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all new this issue:
VAUGHN BODÉ's "THE YELLOW HAT"

plus: special portfolio preview
ROBERT GOULD • JEFFREY JONES • ALAN LEE
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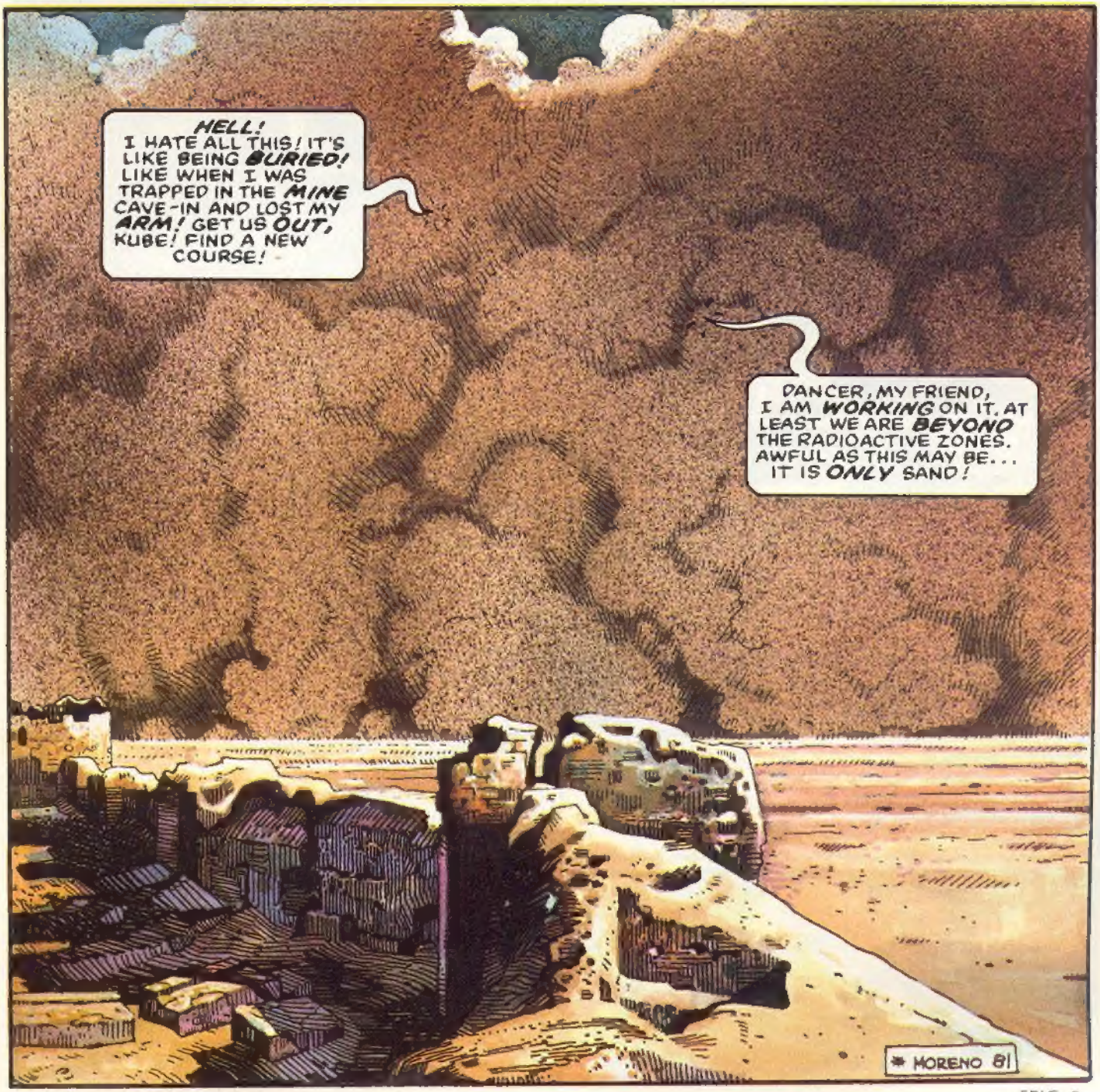
GENERATION ZERO

DESERT HUNT

HELL. EVEN BEFORE THE LIMITED NUCLEAR EXCHANGE THAT PLUNGED THE EARTH INTO CHAOS, HELL HAD ALREADY COME TO THE OIL-RICH MIDDLE-EAST IN THE FORM OF AN ALMOST UNENDING WAR FOR CONTROL. THE MISSILES THAT FELL MERELY MADE IT MORE LITERAL. FIRE. RADIATION. DESTRUCTION. DEATH. **HELL**.

JUAN FALCÓN, DONALD MZIMBA, AND PETER KUBESKY EXPECTED IT TO BE BAD. THEY EACH HAD DESERTED THE VARIOUS PRE-HOLOCAUST ARMIES THEY SERVED JUST PRIOR TO BEING FORCED INTO THE CEASELESS MIDDLE-EASTERN COMBAT. THEY MET SKIRTING THE AREA, STRUGGLING NORTH, WHEN THE MISSILES WERE UNLEASHED. THEY BEHELD HELL COME TO EARTH AND DESPERATELY FLED IT.

BUT EXPECTING IS HARDLY THE SAME AS SEEING. AND WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN SINCE RESUMING THEIR FLIGHT OF EXPLORATION FOR THE TWO SURVIVING COMMUNITIES OF NORTHOLD AND SEAHAVEN CHILLS AND DEPRESSES THEM. THEY NEED A LAND WHERE EARTH'S FIRST **NEW** GENERATION CAN GROW AND THRIVE IN PEACE. INSTEAD, THEY HAVE COME TO A PLACE WITHOUT HOPE.


HELL! I HATE ALL THIS! IT'S LIKE BEING BURIED! LIKE WHEN I WAS TRAPPED IN THE MINE CAVE-IN AND LOST MY ARM! GET US OUT, KUBE! FIND A NEW COURSE!
DANCER, MY FRIEND, I AM WORKING ON IT. AT LEAST WE ARE BEYOND THE RADIOACTIVE ZONES. AWFUL AS THIS MAY BE... IT IS ONLY SAND!
MORENO 81

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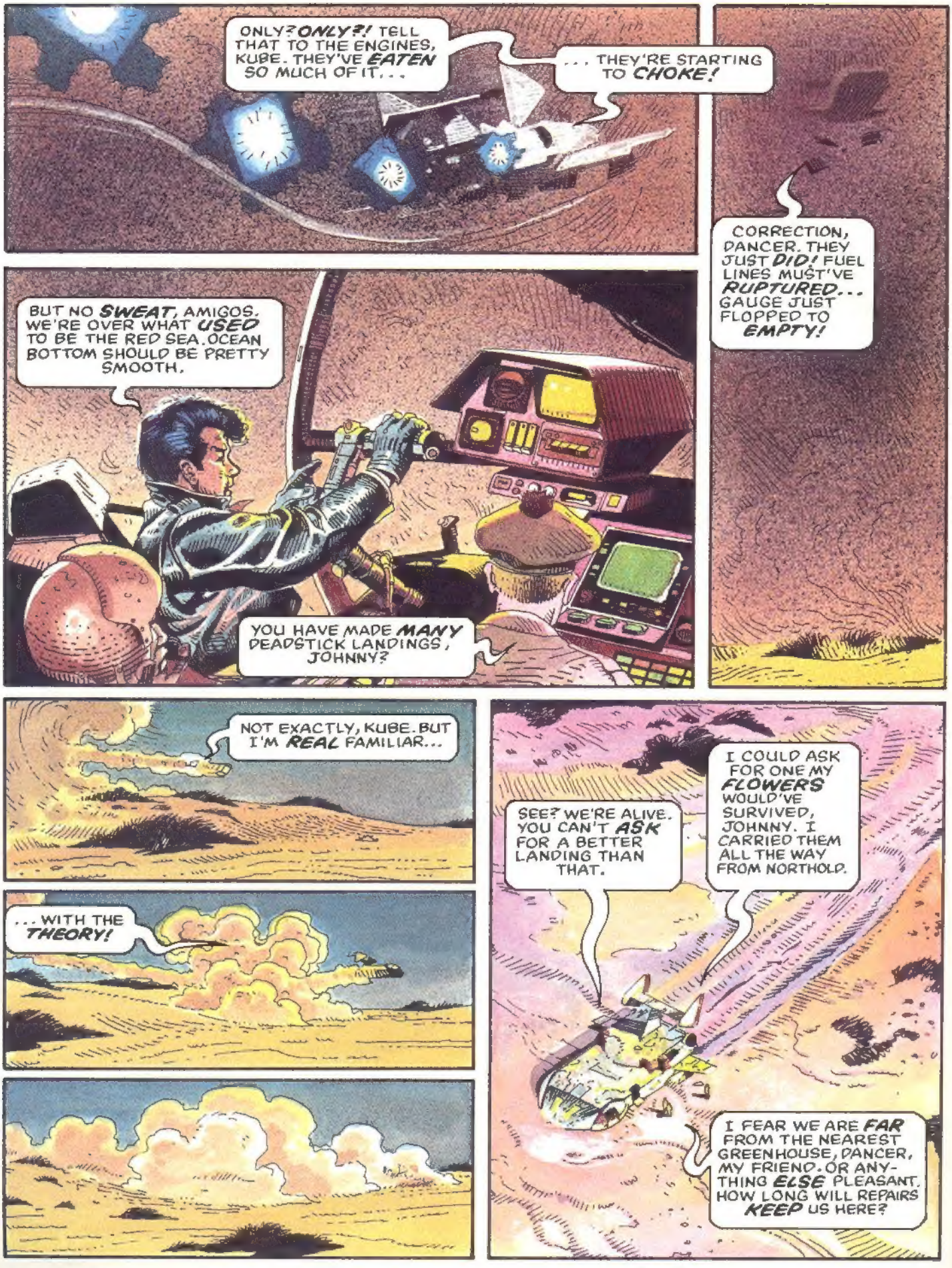
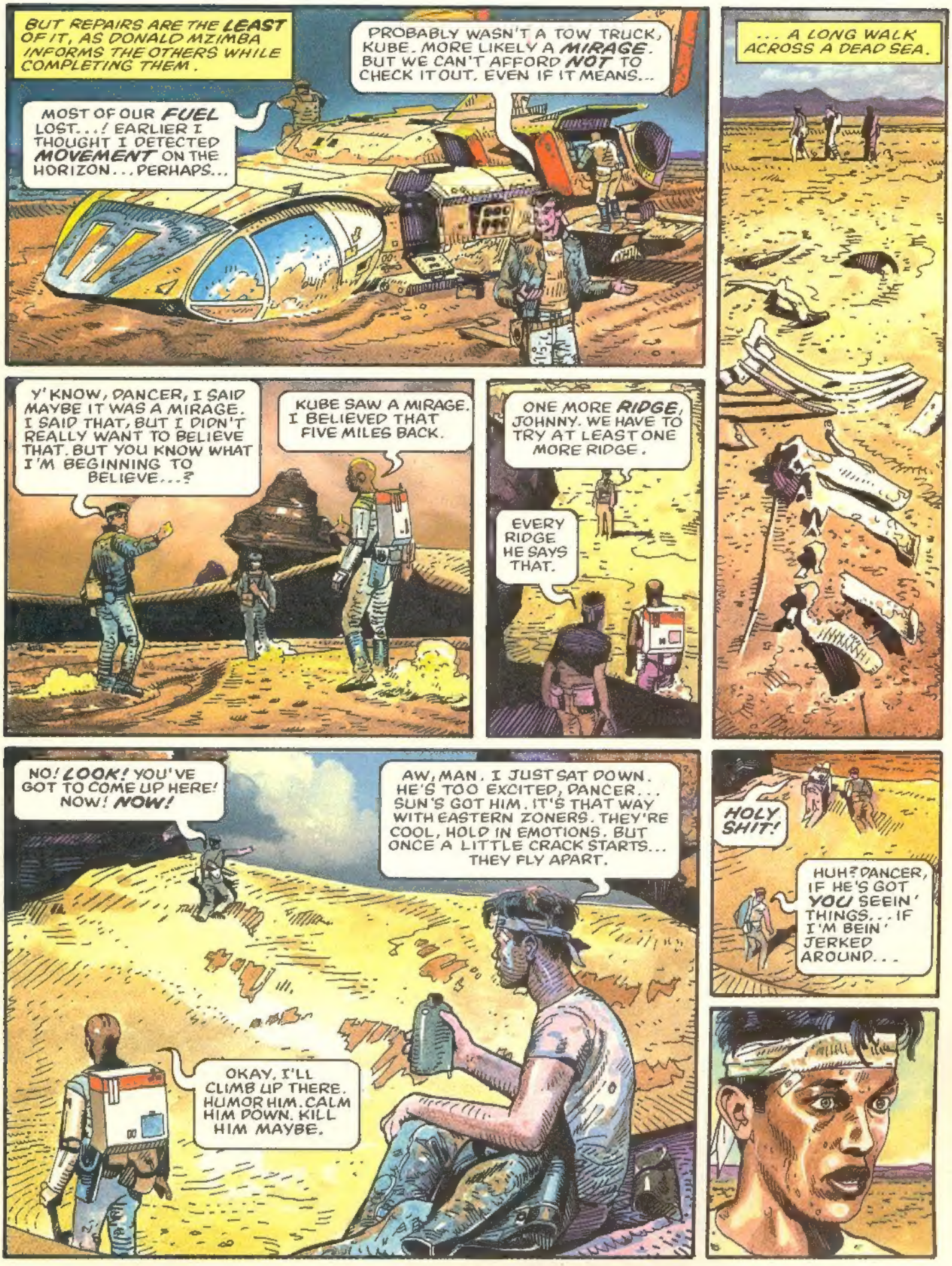
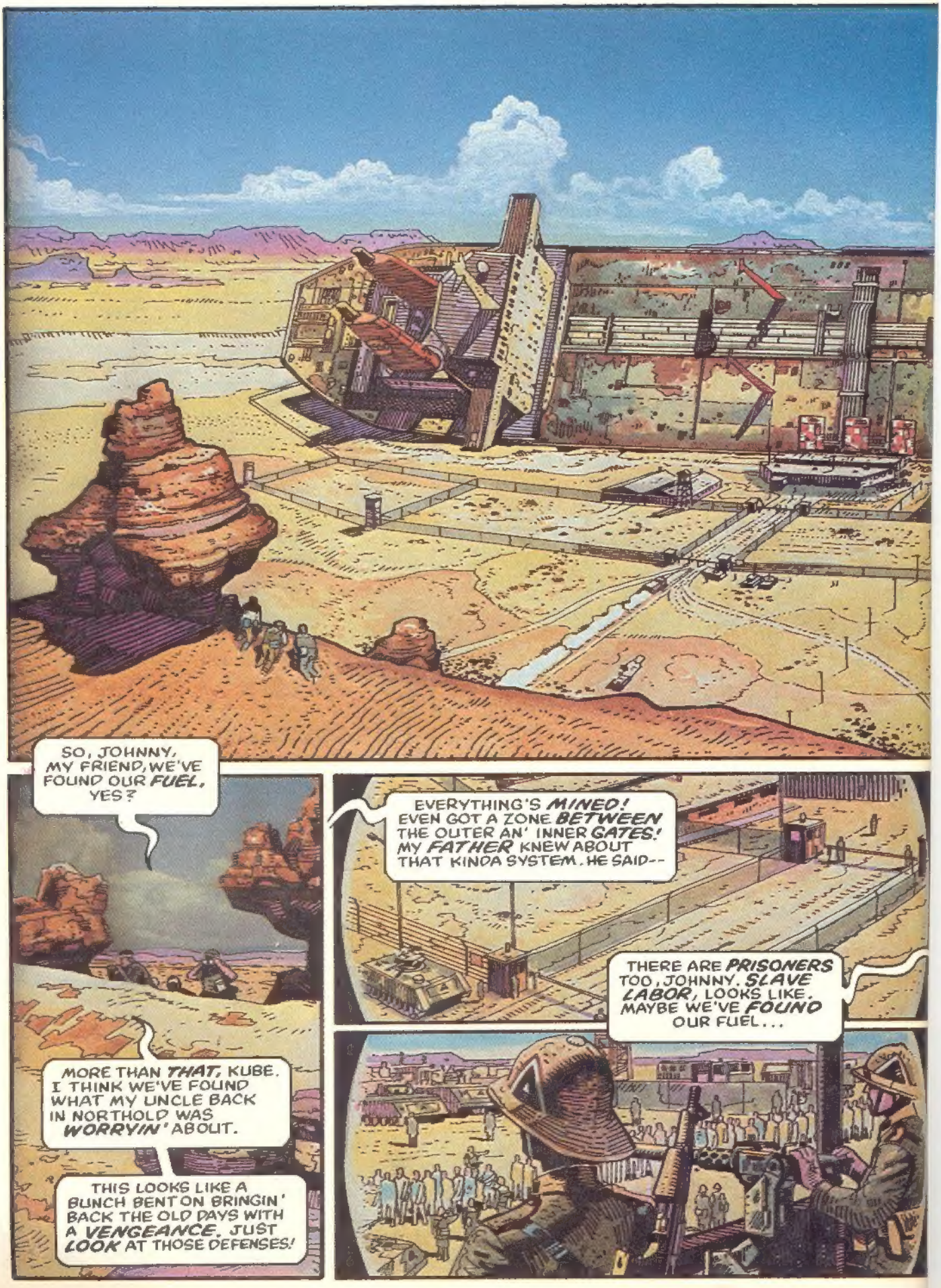
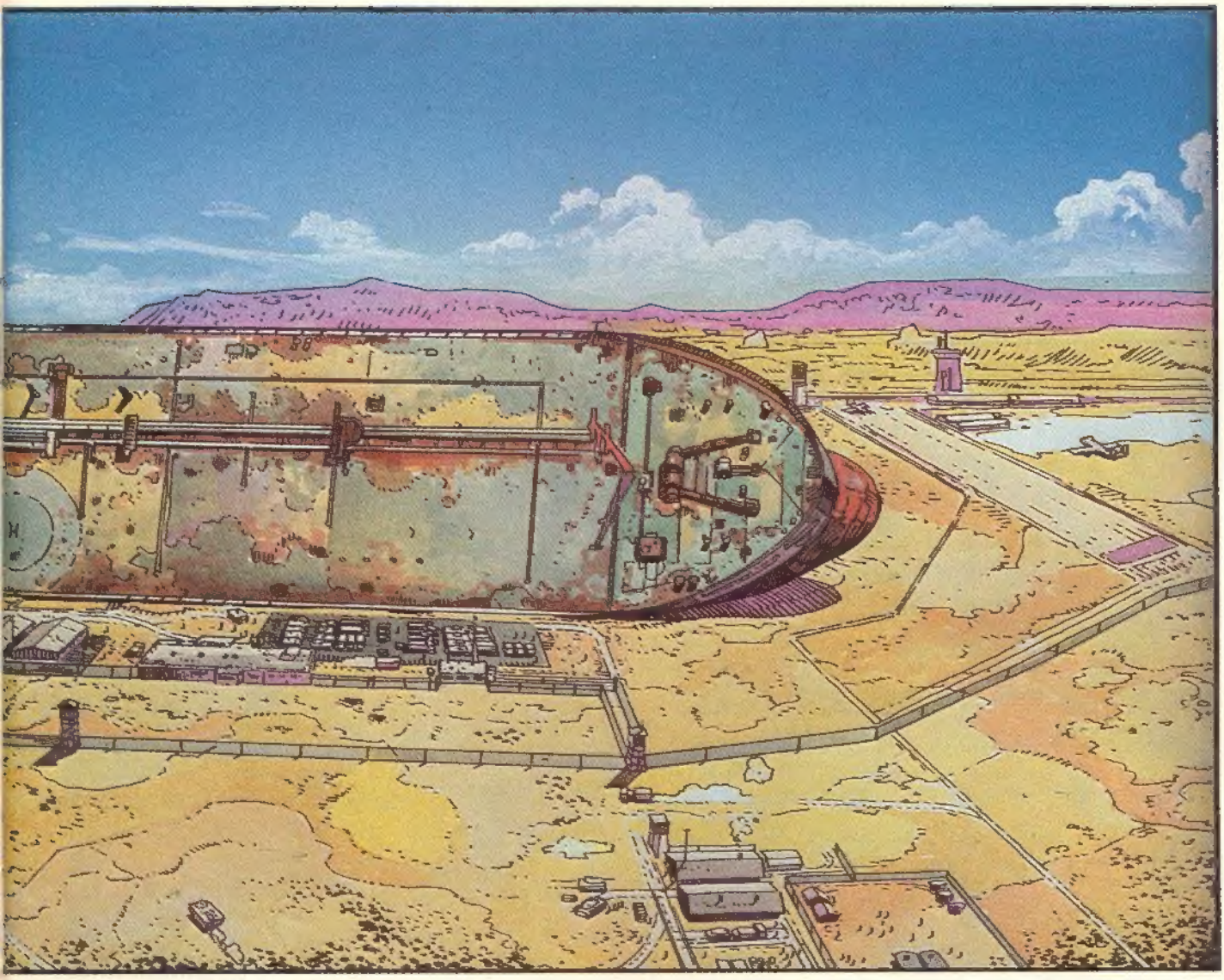

ONLY? ONLY?! TELL THAT TO THE ENGINES, KUBE. THEY'VE EATEN SO MUCH OF IT...
... THEY'RE STARTING TO CHOKE!
CORRECTION, DANCER. THEY JUST DID! FUEL LINES MUST'VE RUPTURED... GAUGE JUST FLOPPED TO EMPTY!
BUT NO SWEAT, AMIGOS. WE'RE OVER WHAT USED TO BE THE RED SEA. OCEAN BOTTOM SHOULD BE PRETTY SMOOTH.
YOU HAVE MADE MANY DEADSTICK LANDINGS, JOHNNY?
NOT EXACTLY, KUBE. BUT I'M REAL FAMILIAR...
... WITH THE THEORY!
SEE? WE'RE ALIVE. YOU CAN'T ASK FOR A BETTER LANDING THAN THAT.
I COULD ASK FOR ONE MY FLOWERS WOULD'VE SURVIVED, JOHNNY. I CARRIED THEM ALL THE WAY FROM NORTHOLD.
I FEAR WE ARE FAR FROM THE NEAREST GREENHOUSE, DANCER, MY FRIEND. OR ANYTHING ELSE PLEASANT. HOW LONG WILL REPAIRS KEEP US HERE?


BUT REPAIRS ARE THE LEAST OF IT, AS DONALD MZIMBA INFORMS THE OTHERS WHILE COMPLETING THEM.
PROBABLY WASN'T A TOW TRUCK, KUBE. MORE LIKELY A MIRAGE. BUT WE CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO CHECK IT OUT, EVEN IF IT MEANS...
MOST OF OUR FUEL LOST...! EARLIER I THOUGHT I DETECTED MOVEMENT ON THE HORIZON... PERHAPS...
... A LONG WALK ACROSS A DEAD SEA.
Y' KNOW, DANCER, I SAID MAYBE IT WAS A MIRAGE. I SAID THAT, BUT I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO BELIEVE THAT. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I'M BEGINNING TO BELIEVE...?
KUBE SAW A MIRAGE. I BELIEVED THAT FIVE MILES BACK.
ONE MORE RIDGE, JOHNNY. WE HAVE TO TRY AT LEAST ONE MORE RIDGE.
EVERY RIDGE HE SAYS THAT.
NO! LOOK! YOU'VE GOT TO COME UP HERE! NOW! NOW!
AW, MAN. I JUST SAT DOWN. HE'S TOO EXCITED, DANCER... SUN'S GOT HIM. IT'S THAT WAY WITH EASTERN ZONERS. THEY'RE COOL, HOLD IN EMOTIONS. BUT ONCE A LITTLE CRACK STARTS... THEY FLY APART.
OKAY, I'LL CLIMB UP THERE. HUMOR HIM. CALM HIM DOWN. KILL HIM MAYBE.
HOLY SHIT!
HUH? DANCER, IF HE'S GOT YOU SEEIN' THINGS... IF I'M BEIN' JERKED AROUND...

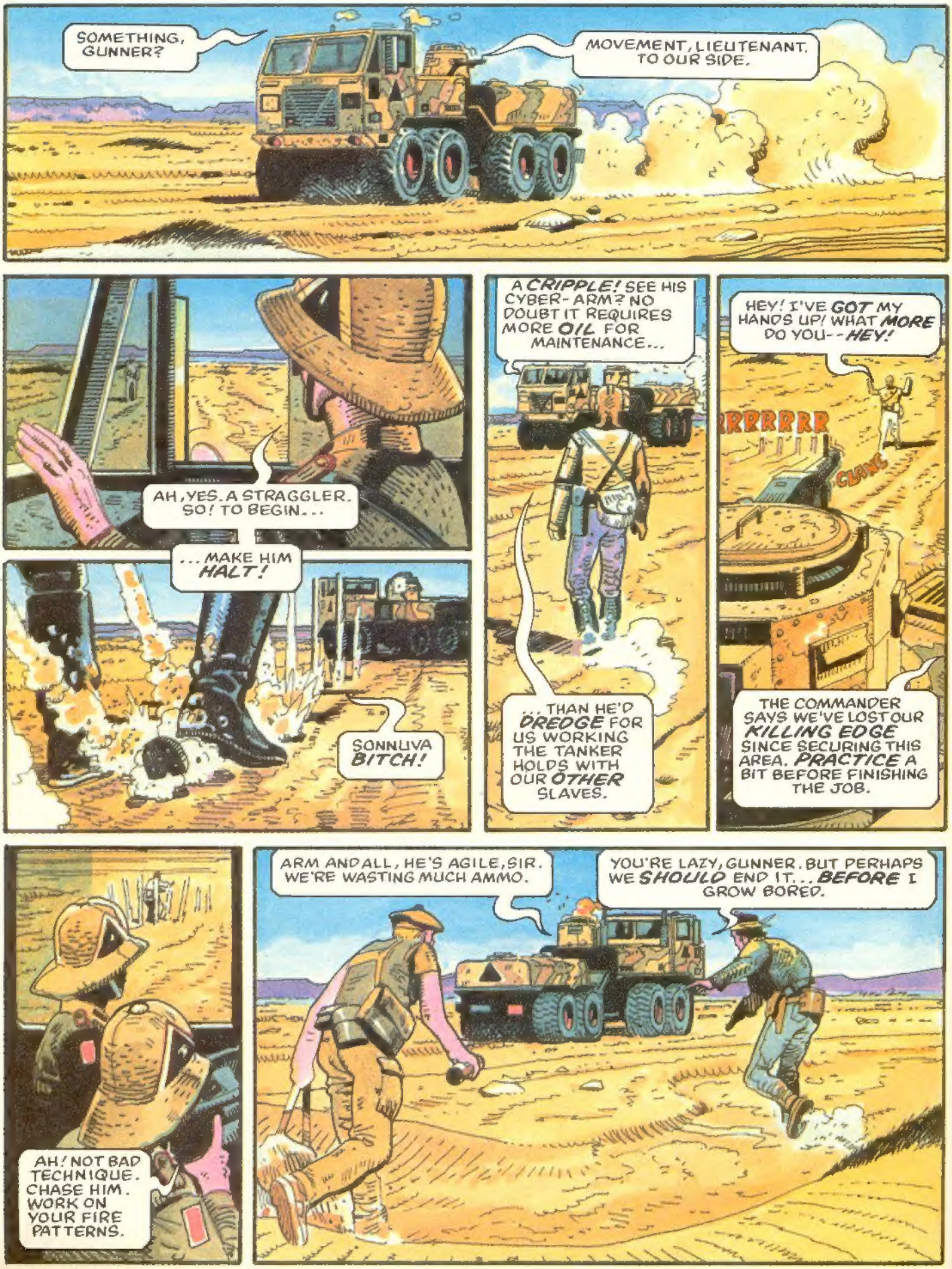

SO, JOHNNY, MY FRIEND, WE'VE FOUND OUR FUEL, YES?
MORE THAN THAT, KUBE. I THINK WE'VE FOUND WHAT MY UNCLE BACK IN NORTHOLD WAS WORRYIN' ABOUT.
THIS LOOKS LIKE A BUNCH BENT ON BRINGIN' BACK THE OLD DAYS WITH A VENGEANCE. JUST LOOK AT THOSE DEFENSES!
EVERYTHING'S MINED! EVEN GOT A ZONE BETWEEN THE OUTER AN' INNER GATES! MY FATHER KNEW ABOUT THAT KINDA SYSTEM. HE SAID--
THERE ARE PRISONERS TOO, JOHNNY. SLAVE LABOR, LOOKS LIKE. MAYBE WE'VE FOUND OUR FUEL...

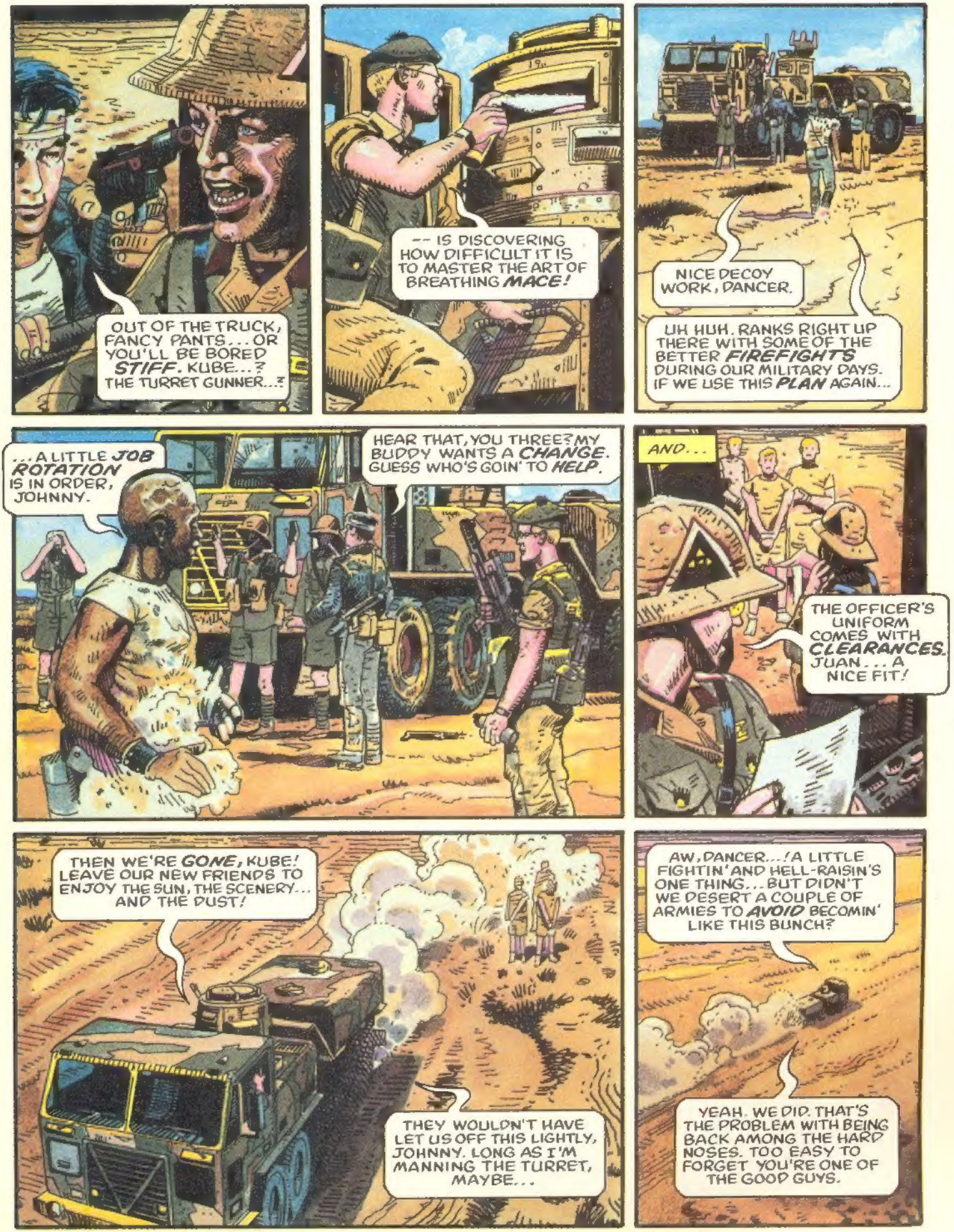


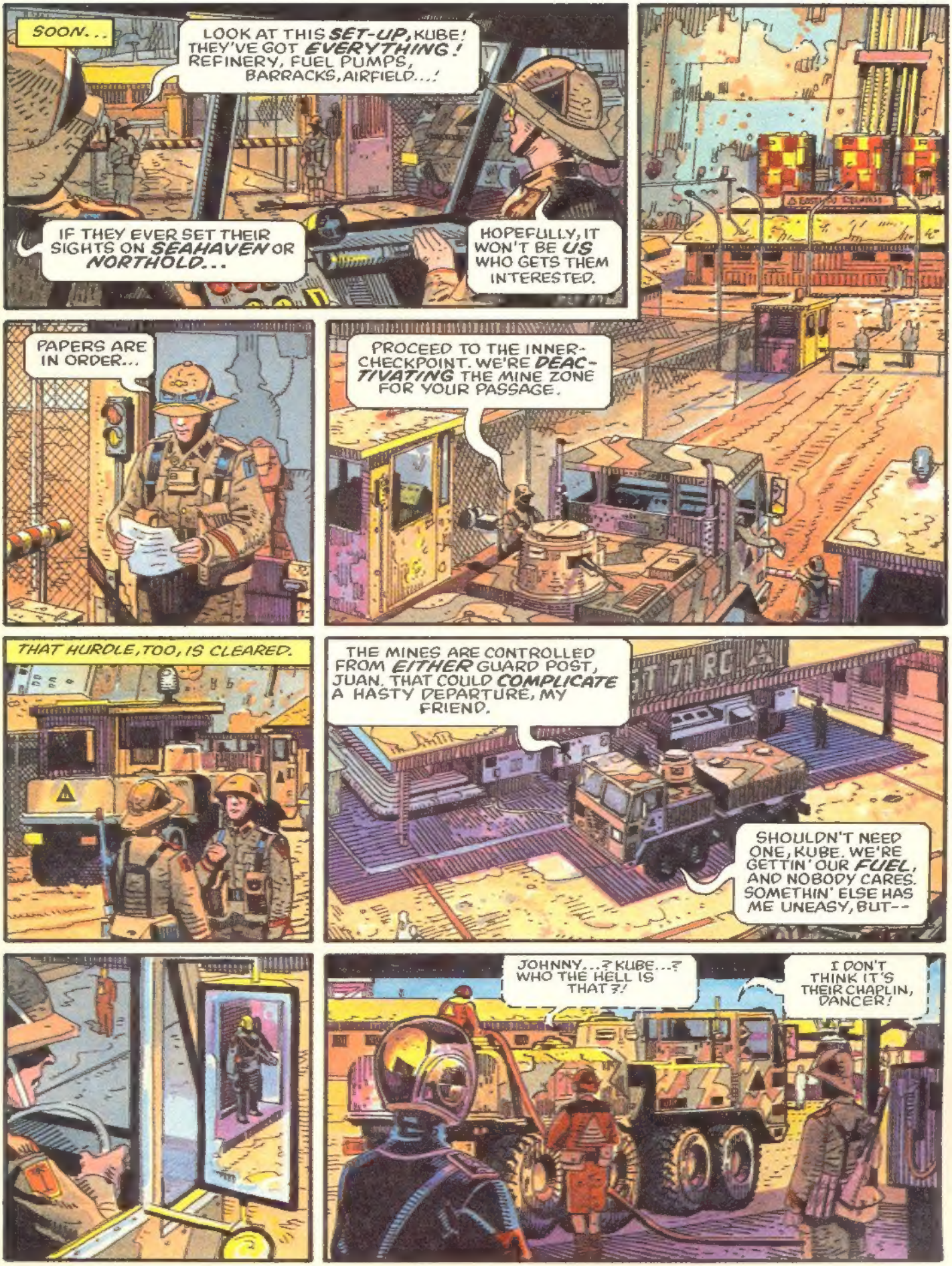
... BUT WE'RE GONNA PLAY HELL *GETTIN'* IT!
DANCER, YOU'RE NOT LOOKIN' AT THE PROBLEM FROM THE PROPER ANGLE.

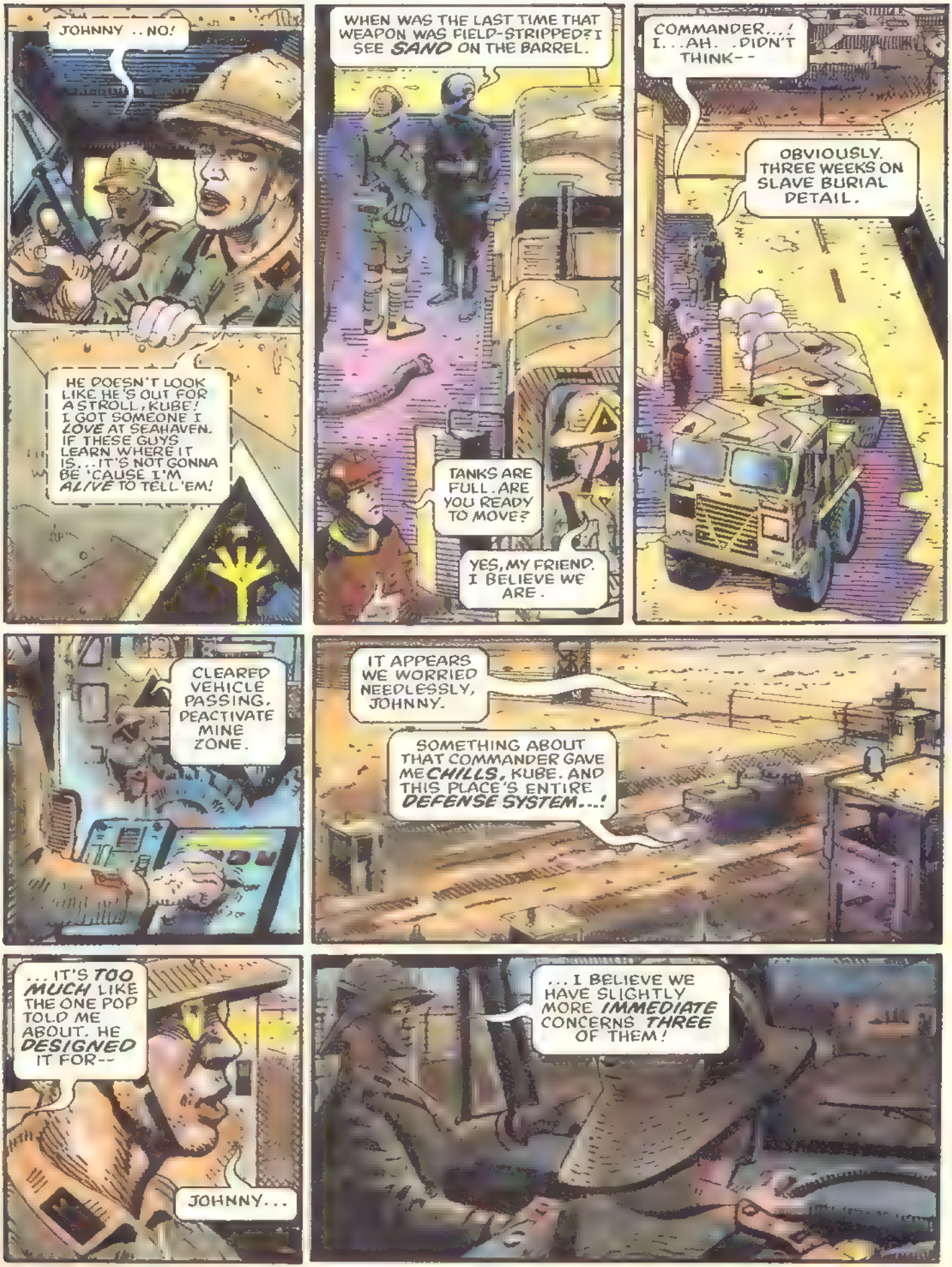
SEE? BET ONE'A *THOSE* IS WHAT KUBE SAW EARLIER. THIS BUNCH MUST USE THEIR SLAVE LABOR TO SUCK THESE BLEACHED TANKERS DRY... THEN MOVE ON. PROBABLY A LOT OF TRAFFIC *BETWEEN* OPERATIONS...
AH! I AM *AHEAD* OF YOU, JOHNNY. I SEE WHAT OUR *PLAN* MUST BE.

GOOD! LET'S *MOVE* IT WHILE THE TRUCK IS STILL ON *THIS* SIDE OF THE RIDGE... OUT OF SIGHT FROM THE BASE.
HURRY, DANCER.
YOU WOULDN'T HURRY IF *YOU* HAD MY PART IN THE PLAN.


SOMETHING, GUNNER?
MOVEMENT, LIEUTENANT. TO OUR SIDE.
AH, YES. A STRAGGLER. SO! TO BEGIN...
...MAKE HIM HALT!
SONNUVA BITCH!
A CRIPPLE! SEE HIS CYBER-ARM? NO DOUBT IT REQUIRES MORE OIL FOR MAINTENANCE...
...THAN HE'D DREDGE FOR US WORKING THE TANKER HOLDS WITH OUR OTHER SLAVES.
HEY! I'VE GOT MY HANDS UP! WHAT MORE DO YOU--HEY!
RRRRRR
CLANG
THE COMMANDER SAYS WE'VE LOST OUR KILLING EDGE SINCE SECURING THIS AREA. PRACTICE A BIT BEFORE FINISHING THE JOB.
AH! NOT BAD TECHNIQUE. CHASE HIM. WORK ON YOUR FIRE PATTERNS.
ARM AND ALL, HE'S AGILE, SIR. WE'RE WASTING MUCH AMMO.
YOU'RE LAZY, GUNNER. BUT PERHAPS WE SHOULD END IT... BEFORE I GROW BORED.

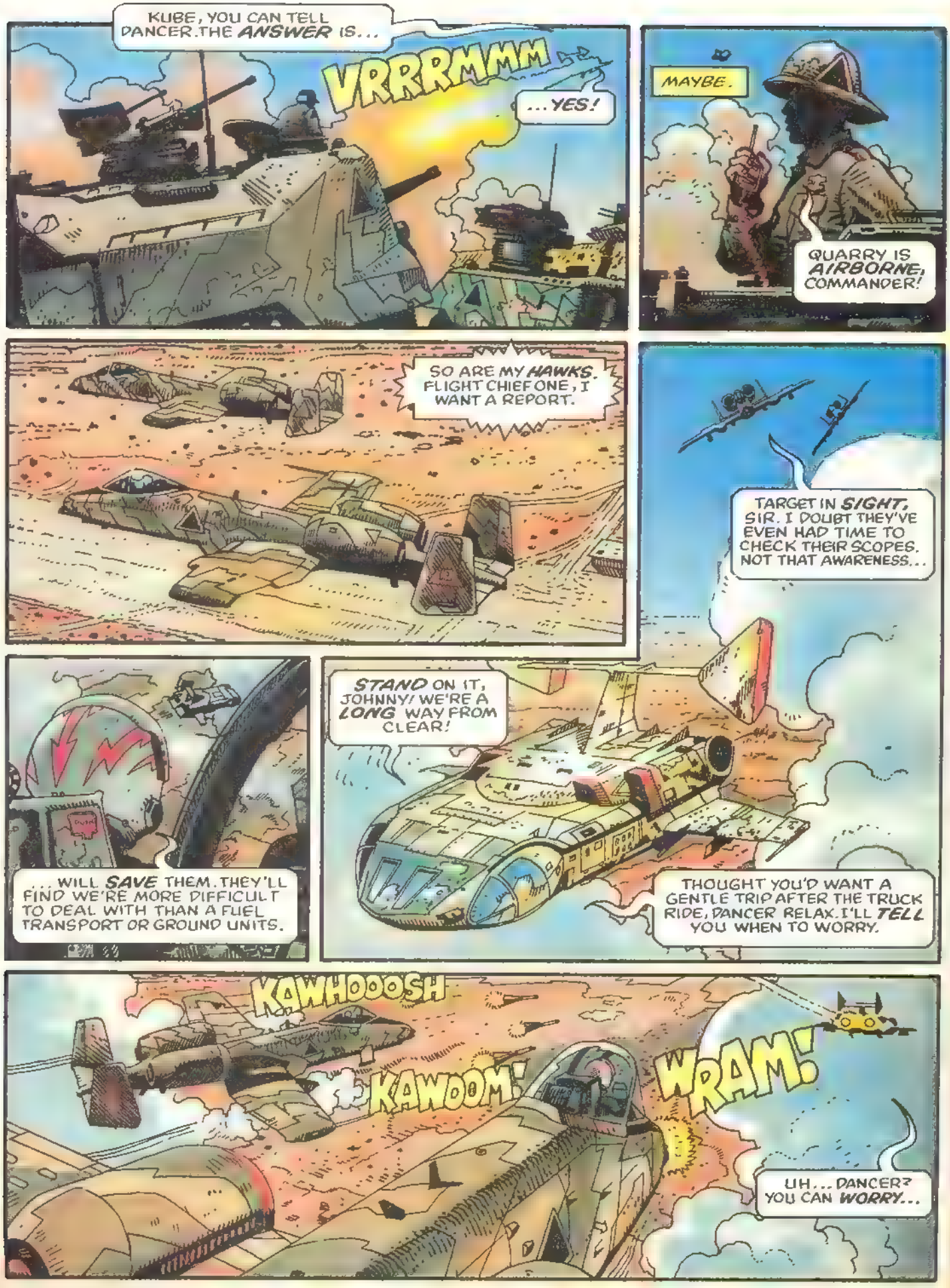

OUT OF THE TRUCK, FANCY PANTS... OR YOU'LL BE BORED *STIFF*. KUBE...? THE TURRET GUNNER...?
-- IS DISCOVERING HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO MASTER THE ART OF BREATHING *MACE!*
NICE DECOY WORK, DANCER.
UH HUH. RANKS RIGHT UP THERE WITH SOME OF THE BETTER *FIREFIGHTS* DURING OUR MILITARY DAYS. IF WE USE THIS *PLAN* AGAIN...
...A LITTLE *JOB ROTATION* IS IN ORDER, JOHNNY.
HEAR THAT, YOU THREE? MY BUDDY WANTS A *CHANGE*. GUESS WHO'S GOIN' TO *HELP*.
AND...
THE OFFICER'S UNIFORM COMES WITH *CLEARANCES*. JUAN... A NICE FIT!
THEN WE'RE *GONE*, KUBE! LEAVE OUR NEW FRIENDS TO ENJOY THE SUN, THE SCENERY... AND THE DUST!
THEY WOULDN'T HAVE LET US OFF THIS LIGHTLY, JOHNNY. LONG AS I'M MANNING THE TURRET, MAYBE...
AW, DANCER...! A LITTLE FIGHTIN' AND HELL-RAISIN'S ONE THING... BUT DIDN'T WE DESERT A COUPLE OF ARMIES TO *AVOID* BECOMIN' LIKE THIS BUNCH?
YEAH. WE DID. THAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH BEING BACK AMONG THE HARD NOSES. TOO EASY TO FORGET YOU'RE ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS.

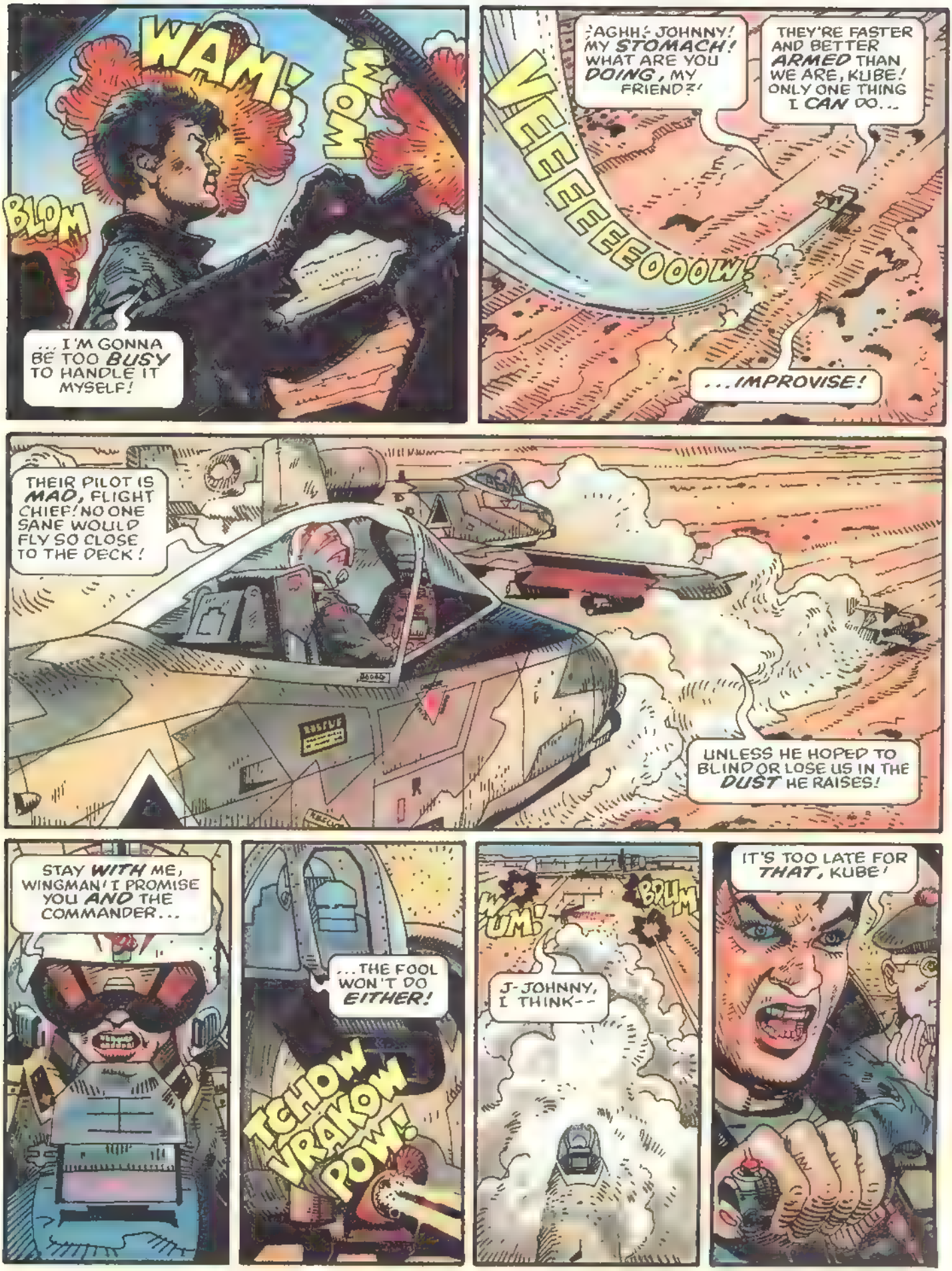

SOON...
LOOK AT THIS SET-UP, KUBE! THEY'VE GOT EVERYTHING! REFINERY, FUEL PUMPS, BARRACKS, AIRFIELD...!
IF THEY EVER SET THEIR SIGHTS ON SEAHAVEN OR NORTHOLD...
HOPEFULLY, IT WON'T BE US WHO GETS THEM INTERESTED.
PAPERS ARE IN ORDER...
PROCEED TO THE INNER-CHECKPOINT. WE'RE DEACTIVATING THE MINE ZONE FOR YOUR PASSAGE.
THAT HURDLE, TOO, IS CLEARED.
THE MINES ARE CONTROLLED FROM EITHER GUARD POST, JUAN. THAT COULD COMPLICATE A HASTY DEPARTURE, MY FRIEND.
SHOULDN'T NEED ONE, KUBE. WE'RE GETTIN' OUR FUEL, AND NOBODY CARES. SOMETHIN' ELSE HAS ME UNEASY, BUT--
JOHNNY...? KUBE...? WHO THE HELL IS THAT?!
I DON'T THINK IT'S THEIR CHAPLIN, DANCER!

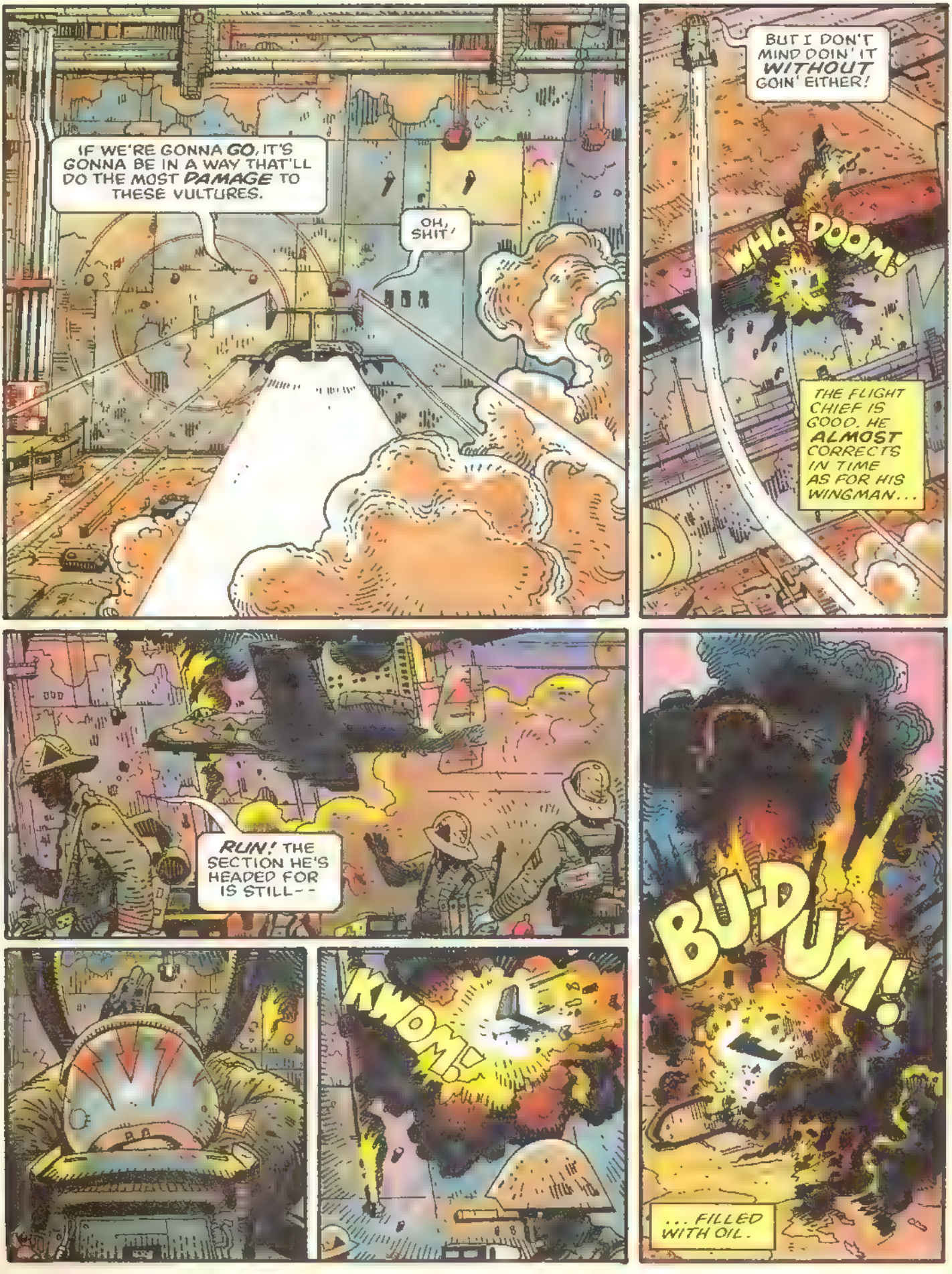

JOHNNY .. NO!
HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE'S OUT FOR A STROLL, KUBE! I GOT SOMEONE I LOVE AT SEAHAVEN. IF THESE GUYS LEARN WHERE IT IS... IT'S NOT GONNA BE 'CAUSE I'M ALIVE TO TELL 'EM!
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME THAT WEAPON WAS FIELD-STRIPPED? I SEE SAND ON THE BARREL.
TANKS ARE FULL. ARE YOU READY TO MOVE?
YES, MY FRIEND. I BELIEVE WE ARE.
COMMANDER...! I...AH. .DIDN'T THINK--
OBVIOUSLY. THREE WEEKS ON SLAVE BURIAL DETAIL.
CLEARED VEHICLE PASSING. DEACTIVATE MINE ZONE.
IT APPEARS WE WORRIED NEEDLESSLY, JOHNNY.
SOMETHING ABOUT THAT COMMANDER GAVE ME CHILLS, KUBE. AND THIS PLACE'S ENTIRE DEFENSE SYSTEM...!
...IT'S TOO MUCH LIKE THE ONE POP TOLD ME ABOUT. HE DESIGNED IT FOR--
JOHNNY...
...I BELIEVE WE HAVE SLIGHTLY MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERNS THREE OF THEM!

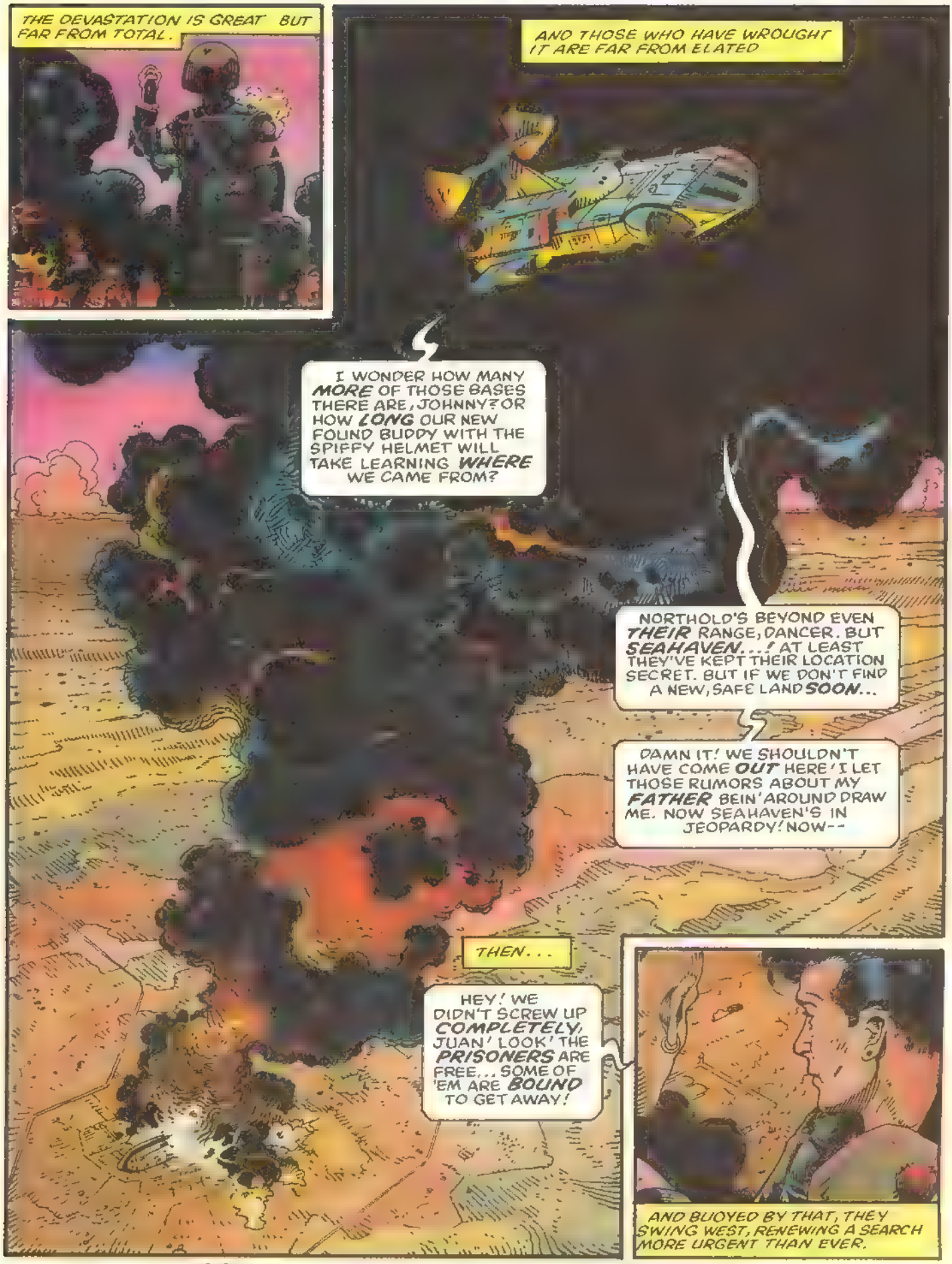
WHAT'S THIS? WHAT ARE THEY SHOUTING?
THE COMMANDER WAS ON A TEAR, GUARD. YOU CARE TO BE CAUGHT LEAVING US IN THE MINE ZONE TO COODLE NOMADS?
KUBE'S LOGIC PREVAILS. BUT REALITY SWIFTLY FOLLOWS.
IDIOTS! THE COMMANDER WILL SEE YOU SHOT FOR THIS! HE WILL---
DEMAND A FULL-- AND VERY SWIFT-- EXPLANATION.
IT IS NOT WELL RECEIVED.
IF THE GUARD IS SHOT, YOU WILL STAND BESIDE HIM, LIEUTENANT!
I WANT THAT TRIO YOU'VE DESCRIBED. WITH AT LEAST ONE ALIVE, PREFERABLY. BUT EVEN DEAD, I WILL HAVE THEM... OR ELSE YOU.
HEY! SLOW IT DOWN, JOHNNY! NOTHING'S AFTER US YET AND NEITHER THE TRUCK NOR THE TERRAIN...
WHONG!
...OR MY HEAD CAN HANDLE THIS!
CAN'T HEAR UP HERE, DANCER' TOO BUSY PUSHIN' THIS BUGGY FOR ALL IT'S WORTH! WATCH YOUR HEAD!
WHONG!
DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT'LL TAKE 'EM, BUT I DOUBT THEY'LL JUST SHRUG AN' LET THIS PASS...
"... WITHOUT SOME KIND 'A PURSUIT."
I WANT EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT INTO THE FIELD. AND I WANT IT NOW!

COMMANDER, FOR MERELY THREE MEN THIS SEEMS--
THREE MEN WHO MUST HAVE COME FROM SOME-WHERE, WHO HAVE VIEWED OUR OPERATION, TESTED ITS STRENGTH...
"...AND WON MY PERSONAL INTEREST."
DANCER, HOW'S IT COMIN' WITH THAT FUEL?
MIGHT GO FASTER IF I DIDN'T HAVE A HEADACHE, AMIGO.
WELL, HUSTLE IT! I THINK I HEAR--
YOU WEREN'T GOING TO SAY TANKS, WERE YOU, JUAN?
ATTENTION! SURRENDER AT ONCE OR WE OPEN FIRE! DO YOU HEAR? WE--
COULD YOU REPEAT THAT SOME MORE? THERE'S A COUPLE OF POINTS WE DIDN'T QUITE GET!
YOU DIDN'T... WHAT? THEY'RE STALLING! FIRE! FIRE!
WOMP!
WUMP!
WOM!
INSIDE, DANCER! I BELIEVE WE'VE OUTSTAYED OUR WELCOME, YES?
DEFINITELY! I JUST HOPE WE TOOK ON ENOUGH FUEL TO OUTLIVE IT!


KUBE, YOU CAN TELL DANCER THE ANSWER IS...
VRRRMMM
...YES!
MAYBE.
QUARRY IS AIRBORNE, COMMANDER!
SO ARE MY HAWKS. FLIGHT CHIEF ONE, I WANT A REPORT.
TARGET IN SIGHT, SIR. I DOUBT THEY'VE EVEN HAD TIME TO CHECK THEIR SCOPES. NOT THAT AWARENESS...
...WILL SAVE THEM. THEY'LL FIND WE'RE MORE DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH THAN A FUEL TRANSPORT OR GROUND UNITS.
STAND ON IT, JOHNNY! WE'RE A LONG WAY FROM CLEAR!
THOUGHT YOU'D WANT A GENTLE TRIP AFTER THE TRUCK RIDE, DANCER. RELAX. I'LL TELL YOU WHEN TO WORRY.
KAWHOOOSH
KAWOOM!
WRAM!
UH... DANCER? YOU CAN WORRY...


WAM!
WOM
BLOM
... I'M GONNA BE TOO BUSY TO HANDLE IT MYSELF!
VEEEEEOOOW!
¡AGHH! JOHNNY! MY STOMACH! WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MY FRIEND?!
THEY'RE FASTER AND BETTER ARMED THAN WE ARE, KUBE! ONLY ONE THING I CAN DO...
...IMPROVISE!
THEIR PILOT IS MAD, FLIGHT CHIEF! NO ONE SANE WOULD FLY SO CLOSE TO THE DECK!
UNLESS HE HOPED TO BLIND OR LOSE US IN THE DUST HE RAISES!
STAY WITH ME, WINGMAN! I PROMISE YOU AND THE COMMANDER...
...THE FOOL WON'T DO EITHER!
TCHOW VRAKOW POW!
WUM!
BRUM
J-JOHNNY, I THINK--
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT, KUBE!


IF WE'RE GONNA GO, IT'S GONNA BE IN A WAY THAT'LL DO THE MOST DAMAGE TO THESE VULTURES.
OH, SHIT!
BUT I DON'T MIND DOIN' IT WITHOUT GOIN' EITHER!
WHA-DOOM!
THE FLIGHT CHIEF IS GOOD. HE ALMOST CORRECTS IN TIME AS FOR HIS WINGMAN...
RUN! THE SECTION HE'S HEADED FOR IS STILL--
KWOM!
BU-DUM!
... FILLED WITH OIL.

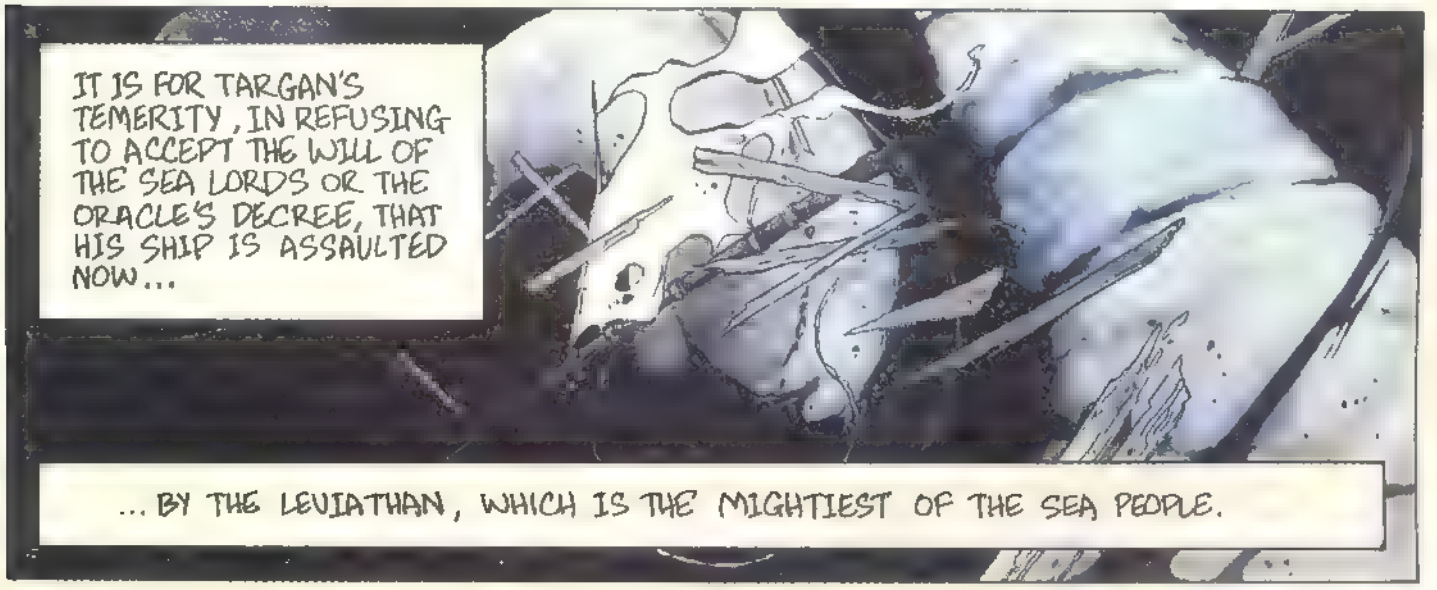

THE DEVASTATION IS GREAT BUT FAR FROM TOTAL.
AND THOSE WHO HAVE WROUGHT IT ARE FAR FROM ELATED
I WONDER HOW MANY MORE OF THOSE BASES THERE ARE, JOHNNY? OR HOW LONG OUR NEW FOUND BUDDY WITH THE SPIFFY HELMET WILL TAKE LEARNING WHERE WE CAME FROM?
NORTHOLD'S BEYOND EVEN THEIR RANGE, DANCER. BUT SEAHAVEN...! AT LEAST THEY'VE KEPT THEIR LOCATION SECRET. BUT IF WE DON'T FIND A NEW, SAFE LAND SOON...
DAMN IT! WE SHOULDN'T HAVE COME OUT HERE! I LET THOSE RUMORS ABOUT MY FATHER BEIN' AROUND DRAW ME. NOW SEAHAVEN'S IN JEOPARDY! NOW--
THEN...
HEY! WE DIDN'T SCREW UP COMPLETELY, JUAN! LOOK! THE PRISONERS ARE FREE... SOME OF 'EM ARE BOUND TO GET AWAY!
AND BUOYED BY THAT, THEY SWING WEST, RENEWING A SEARCH MORE URGENT THAN EVER.

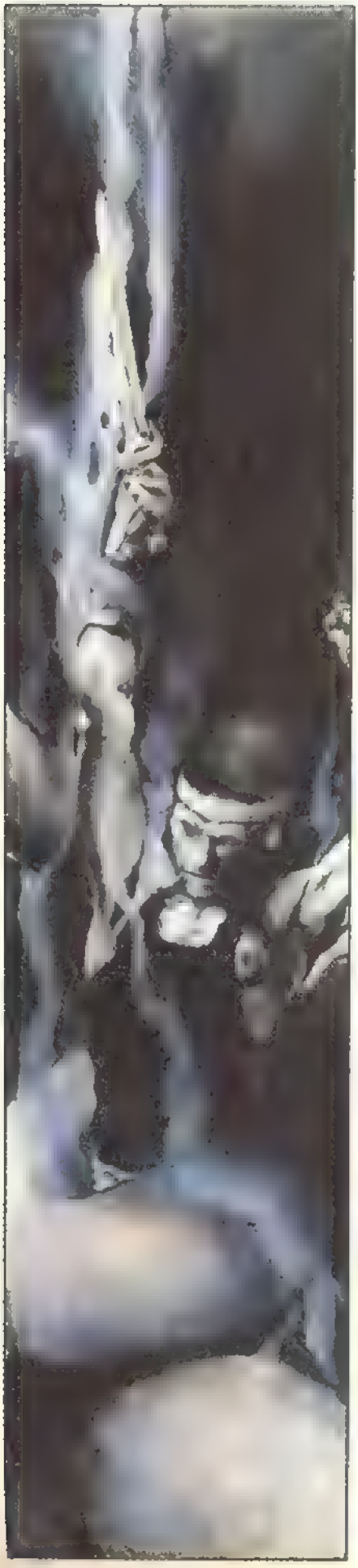
NEXT ISSUE: GENERATION ZERO CONTINUES!

MARCHINGE
I AM OF THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA, AND HAVE BEEN MAROONED HERE ON THIS ISLAND, LOCKED IN THIS LONELY TOWER BY MY CRUEL MASTERS, FOR MANY LONG MONTHS.
I KNOW THE MANY TONGUES OF THE WATERS, AND THE SEA BREEZES SPEAK TO ME, CARRYING TO MY MIND'S EYE THE IMAGE OF, FAR AWAY, A SHIP.
A SHIP THAT IS BESET BY A TEMPEST, BUFFETED BY THE WATERS AND THE WINDS. IT BEARS AN ENEMY OF THE SEA LORDS.

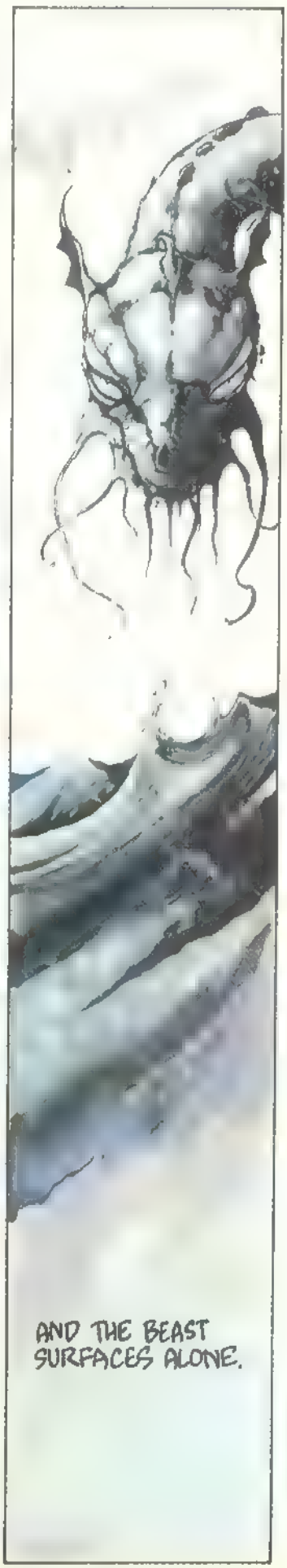
artwork ©1983 Kent Williams/story ©1983 Jo Duffy

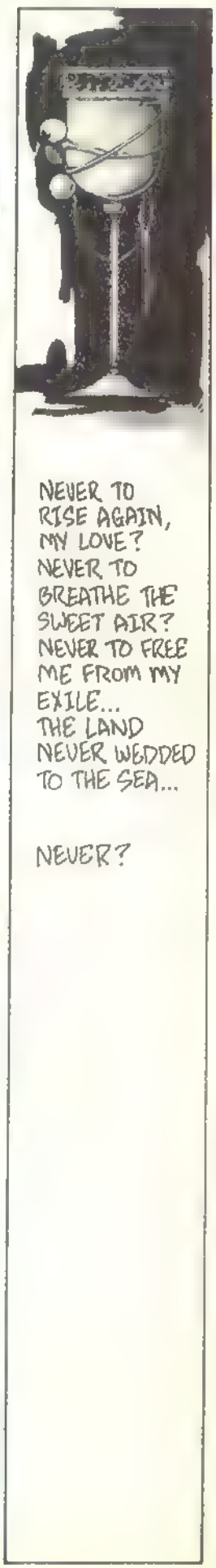
ON THE DECK OF THAT VESSEL, SHOUTING HIS DEFIANCE TO THE WINDS, IS TARGAN, A PRINCE OF THE LAND.
HE IS A NOBLE WARRIOR AND WAS MY LOVE, UNTIL IT PLEASED MY MASTERS TO SUNDER US.
WHEN WE PARTED, THE ORACLE FORETOLD THAT WE WOULD NEVER BE UNITED AGAIN.


IT IS FOR TARGAN'S TEMERITY, IN REFUSING TO ACCEPT THE WILL OF THE SEA LORDS OR THE ORACLE'S DECREE, THAT HIS SHIP IS ASSAULTED NOW...
... BY THE LEVIATHAN, WHICH IS THE MIGHTIEST OF THE SEA PEOPLE.



YET FOR MY SAKE TARGAN GRAPPLES WITH IT, AND DOES NOT FEAR.


AND THE BEAST SURFACES ALONE.


NEVER TO RISE AGAIN, MY LOVE?
NEVER TO BREATHE THE SWEET AIR?
NEVER TO FREE ME FROM MY EXILE...
THE LAND NEVER WEDDED TO THE SEA...
NEVER?

AND I EMPTY MY CUP TO THE MEMORY OF MY LOVE,
AND I THINK OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN,
AND I WEEP.
UNTIL I HEAR A FOOTFALL ON THE ROCK OUTSIDE...
...AND A HAND UPON THE DOOR.
T-TARGAN... O MY PRINCE, MY LOVE...
MARGHINÊE... MY HEART, WHY DO YOU WEEP?
SURELY YOU ARE GLAD TO SEE ME!
YES, MY PRINCE, BUT VERY SORRY THAT IN MY DESPAIR...
...I DRANK FROM A POISONED CUP.

Prologue
BRAVE KNIGHTS, KNOW YE THAT WHOSOEVER SLAYS YON JABBERWOCKY SHALL WIN THE HAND OF THE FAIR PRINCESS ELAINE
KING HAROLD

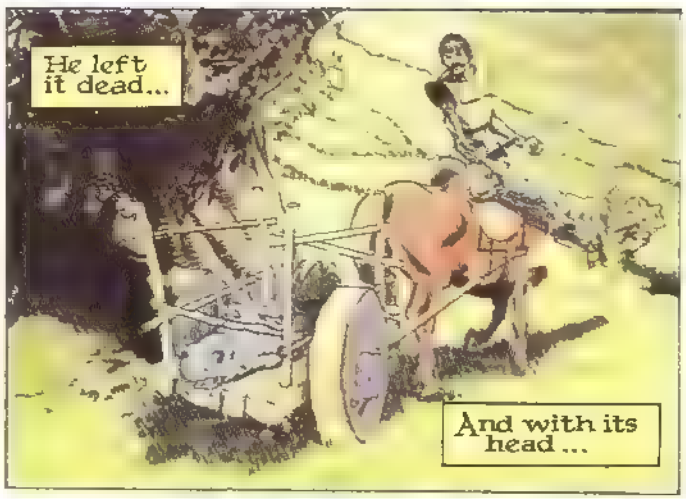
© 1983 Bo Hampton

Lewis Carroll's
Jabberwocky
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe...
All mimsy were the borogoves, and the mome raths outgrabe.
"Beware the Jabberwock, my son.
"...the jaws that bite, the claws that catch!"
"Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun the frumious Bandersnatch!"
He took his vorpal sword in hand... long time the manxome foe he sought...
FREELY ADAPTED
by BO HAMPTON and GARRET LAVIN

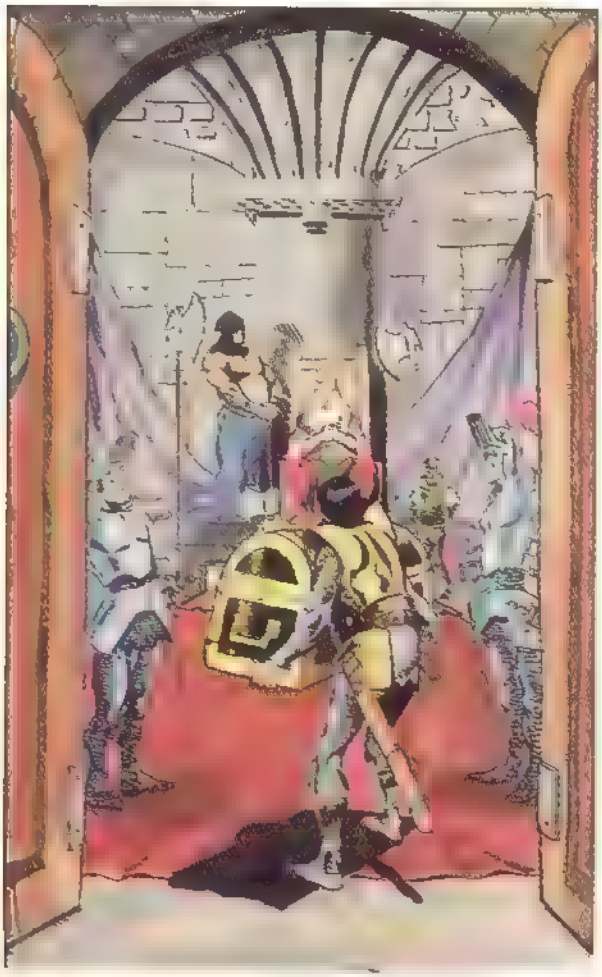
So rested he by the Tumtum tree ..
And stood awhile in thought.
And, as in uffish thought he stood, the Jabberwock...
...with eyes of flame...
...came whiffling through the tulgey wood...
WHIFFLE!
CLANK! CLANK!
CLOP! CLOP!
SMASH! TROMP!

...and burbled as it came!
THUDD!

One, two! One, two! And thru and thru...
The vorpal sword went snicker-snack!


He left it dead...
And with its head ...

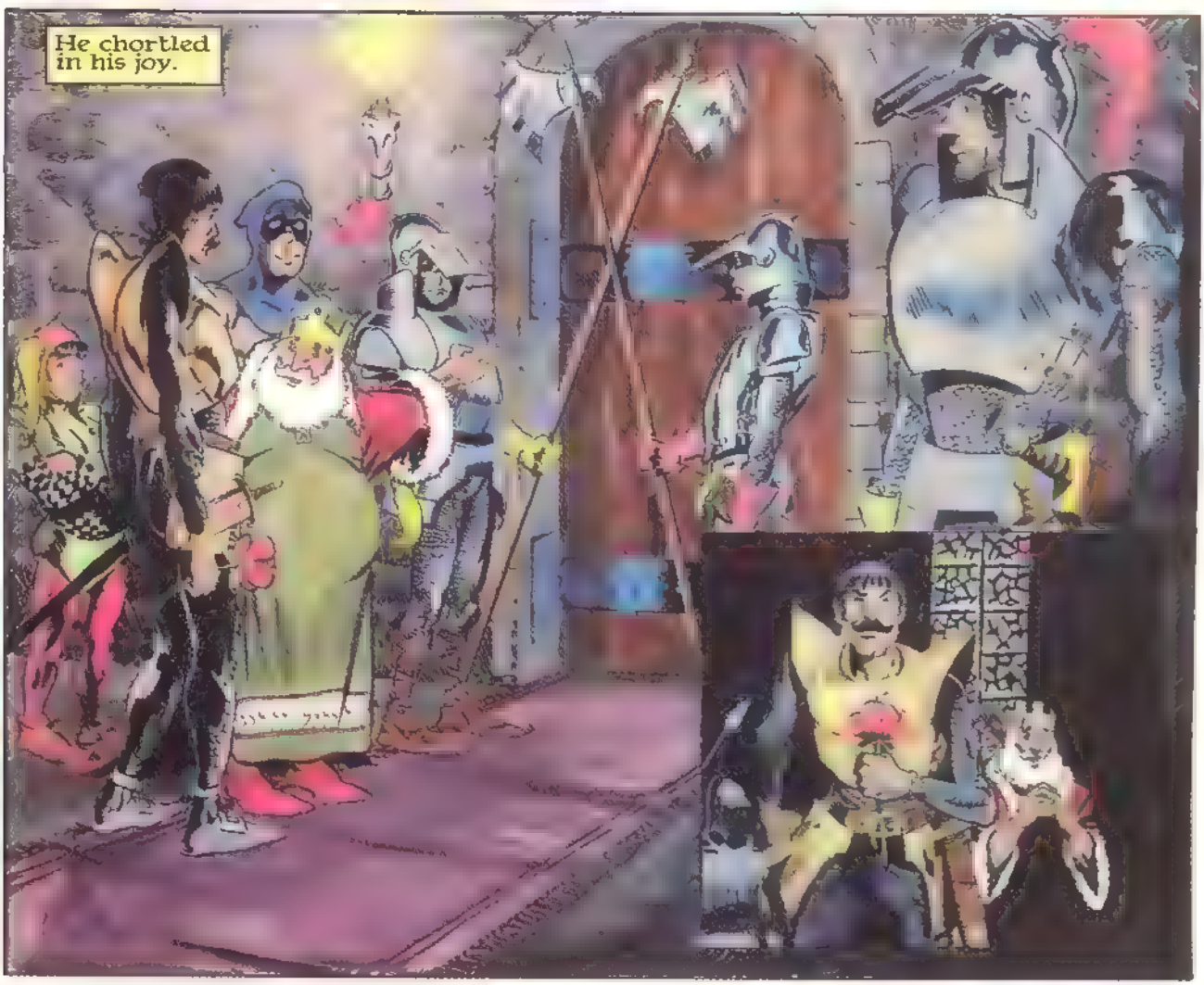
He went galumphing back.

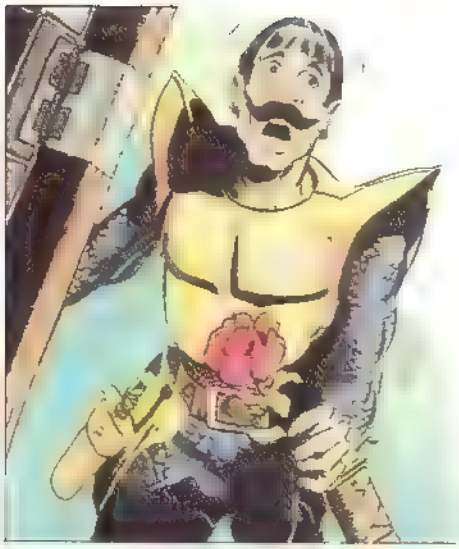


"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?"

"Come to my arms, my beamish boy!"

O FRABJOUS DAY!
KA-LOO, KA-LAY!


He chortled in his joy.



Epilogue
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

All mimsy were the borogoves...
And the mome raths outgrabe.

BRAVE KNIGHTS, KNOW YE THAT WHOSOEVER SLAYS YON BANDERSNATCH JABBERWOCKY SHALL WIN THE HAND OF THE FAIR PRINCESS ELAINE
KING HAROLD
Hampton + Levin

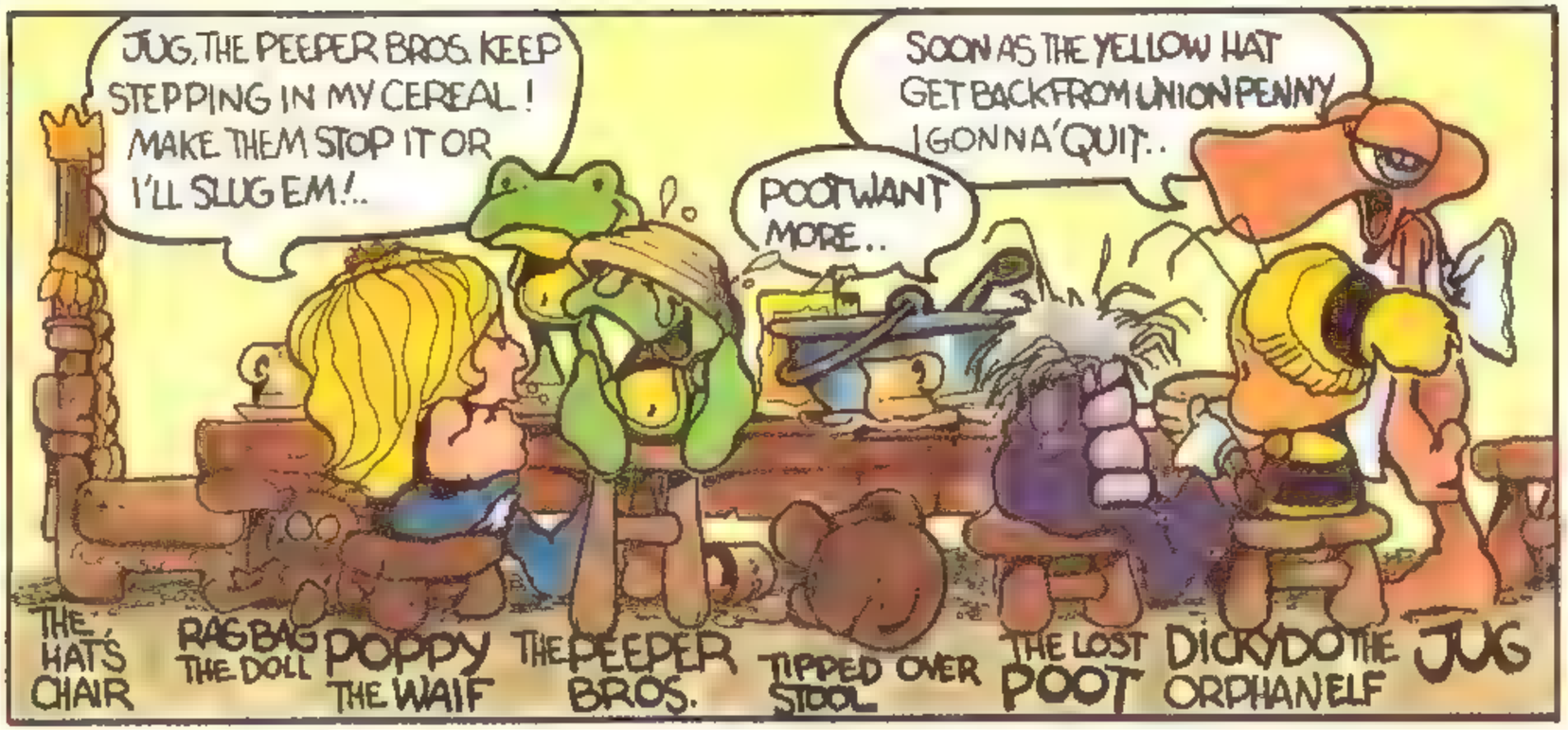
Easily the most popular and successful of Vaughn Bodé's many characters was the irrepressible Cheech Wizard, a free-spirited, cynical philosopher who, over the years, has brought joy to millions and inspired a host of imitations. However, few people realize that at one time, Cheech Wizard was being considered for a daily newspaper comic strip. Back in the early 1970s, Bodé and the Post-Hall Syndicate discussed the possibility of developing a strip around the character, entitled *Tales of the Yellow Hat*. However, after doing a great deal of preliminary work on the project, Bodé voluntarily abandoned it, realizing that in toning down the strip enough to make it acceptable to public tastes, he would have had to sacrifice the very elements of sexual and social satire that made Cheech Wizard what he was. In his son's words, the project simply became too laid back to be worth continuing. However, going through his father's inventory of artwork, Mark Bodé found the completed penciled and written sample strips. Unwilling to let something into which so much work had gone lie forgotten Mark put the drawings on a lightbox, and lettered, inked and colored them. The pages that follow are those finished strips – Cheech Wizard as Middle America would have seen him

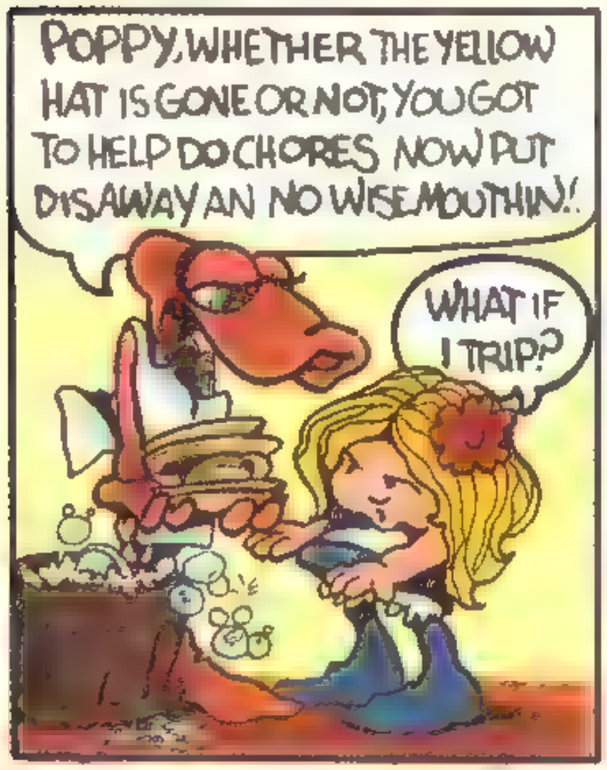
VAUGHN BODÉ'S THE YELLOW HAT

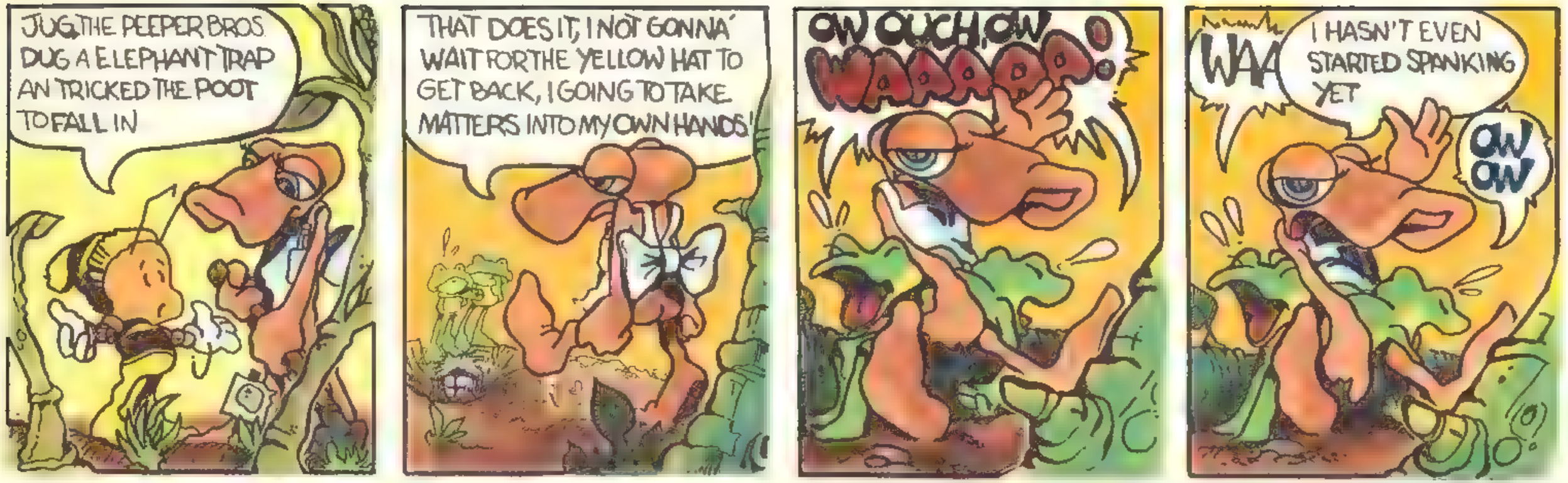
EPIC 43

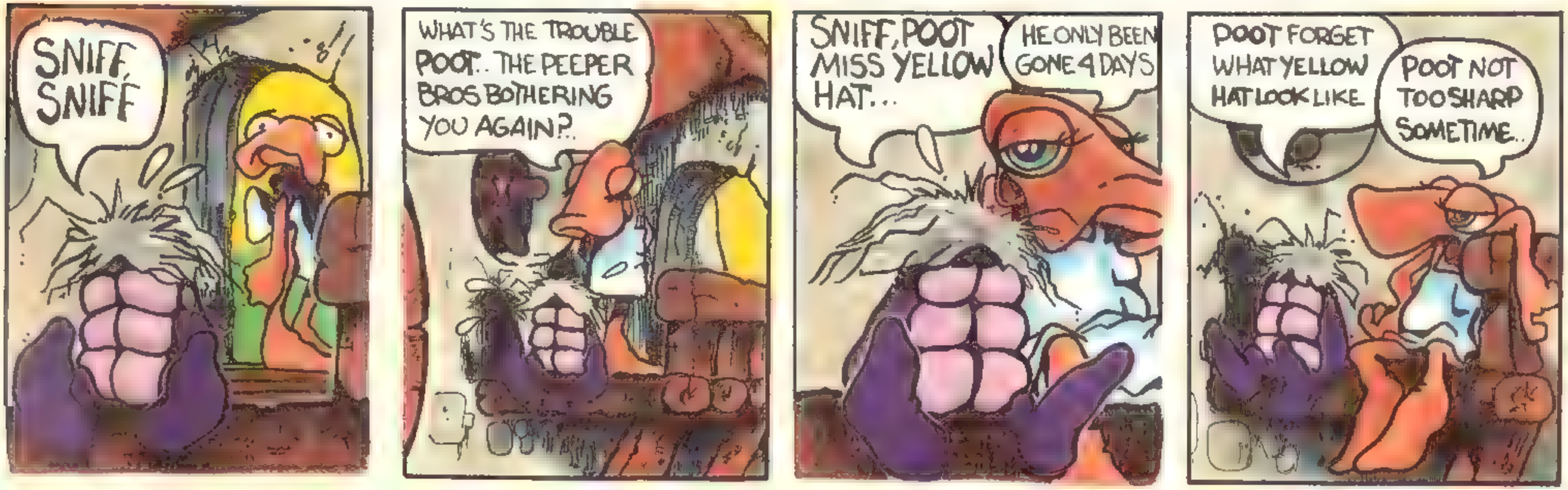
© 1983 Barbara Bodé

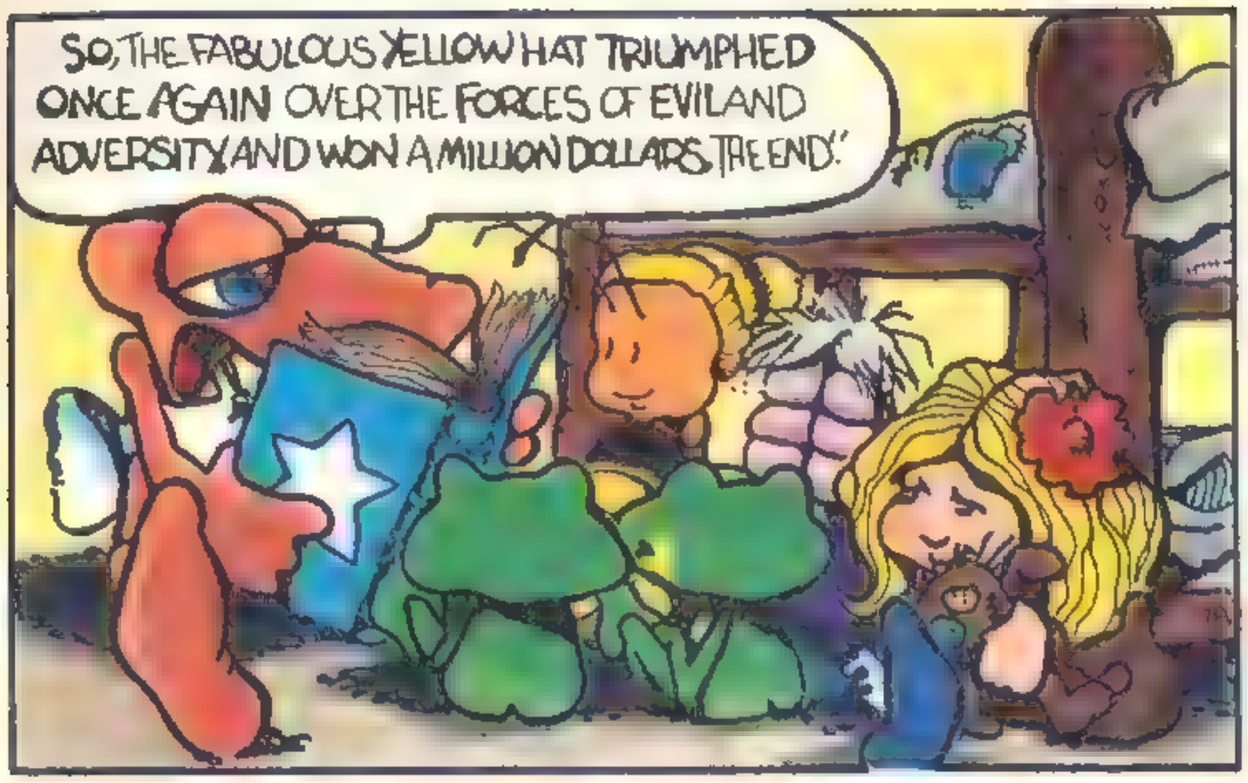
AT 2:30 IN THE AFTERNOON ON CRIKET'S POND.


JUG, THE PEEPER BROS. KEEP STEPPING IN MY CEREAL! MAKE THEM STOP IT OR I'LL SLUG EM!..
POOT WANT MORE..
SOON AS THE YELLOW HAT GET BACK FROM UNION PENNY I GONNA 'QUIT..
THE HAT'S CHAIR
RAG BAG THE DOLL
POPPY THE WAIF
THE PEEPER BROS.
TIPPED OVER STOOL
THE LOST POOT
DICKYDO THE ORPHAN ELF
JUG

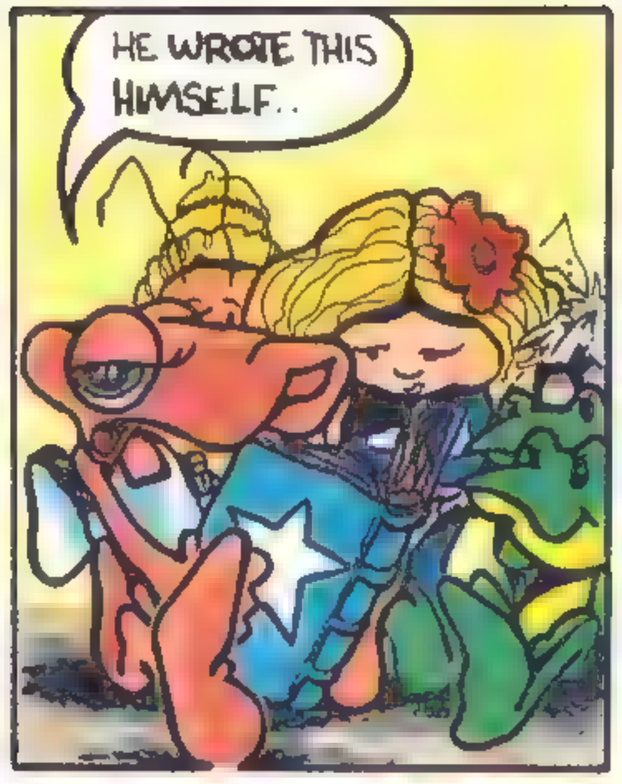


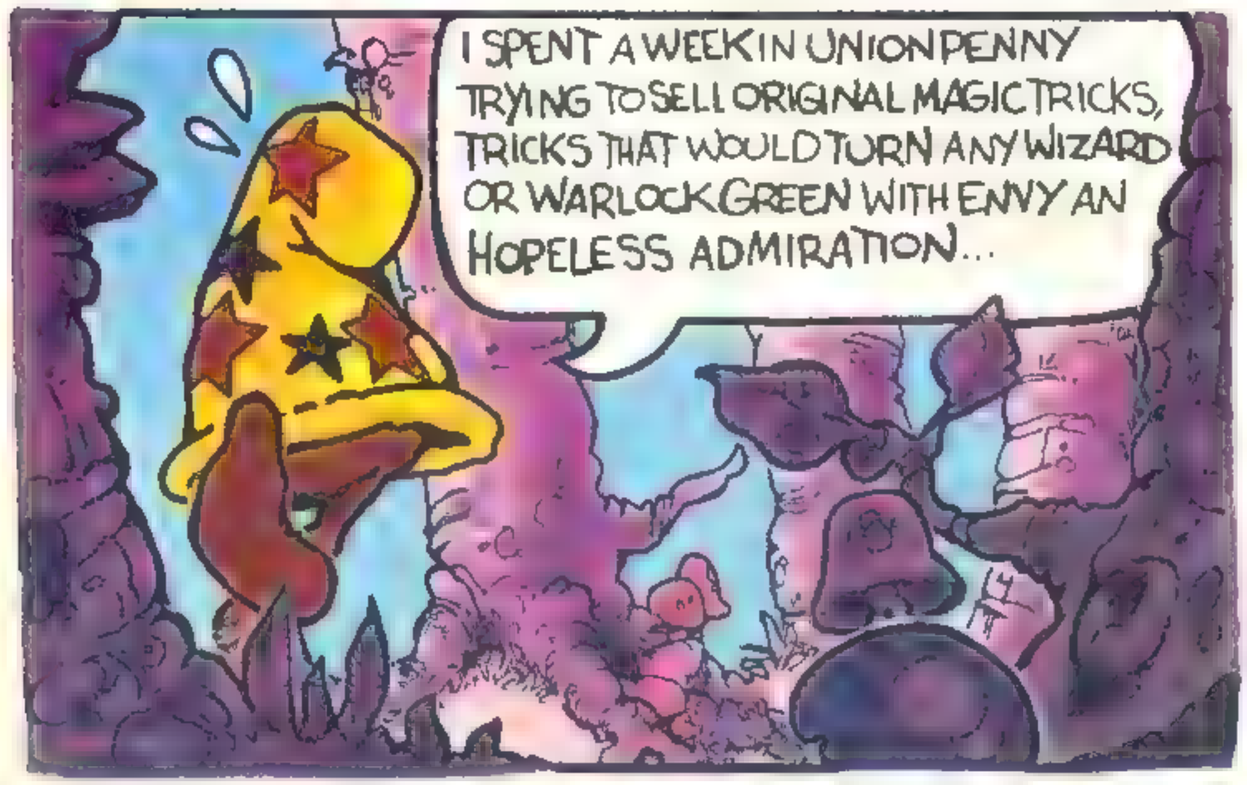

JUG THE PEEPER BROS DUG A ELEPHANT TRAP AN TRICKED THE POOT TO FALL IN
THAT DOES IT, I NOT GONNA' WAIT FOR THE YELLOW HAT TO GET BACK, I GOING TO TAKE MATTERS INTO MY OWN HANDS!
OW OUCH OW WAAARRR!
WAA
I HASN'T EVEN STARTED SPANKING YET
OW OW


SNIFF, SNIFF
WHAT'S THE TROUBLE POOT.. THE PEEPER BROS BOTHERING YOU AGAIN?..
SNIFF, POOT MISS YELLOW HAT...
HE ONLY BEEN GONE 4 DAYS
POOT FORGET WHAT YELLOW HAT LOOK LIKE
POOT NOT TOO SHARP SOMETIME..


SO, THE FABULOUS YELLOW HAT TRIUMPHED ONCE AGAIN OVER THE FORCES OF EVIL AND ADVERSITY AND WON A MILLION DOLLARS. THE END."

OUR NEXT BEDTIME STORY IS "HOW THE YELLOW HAT SAVED THE WORLD"...
JUG WHO WROTE ABOUT THE HAT SO MUCH?


HE WROTE THIS HIMSELF..


I SPENT A WEEK IN UNION PENNY TRYING TO SELL ORIGINAL MAGIC TRICKS, TRICKS THAT WOULD TURN ANY WIZARD OR WARLOCK GREEN WITH ENVY AN HOPELESS ADMIRATION...

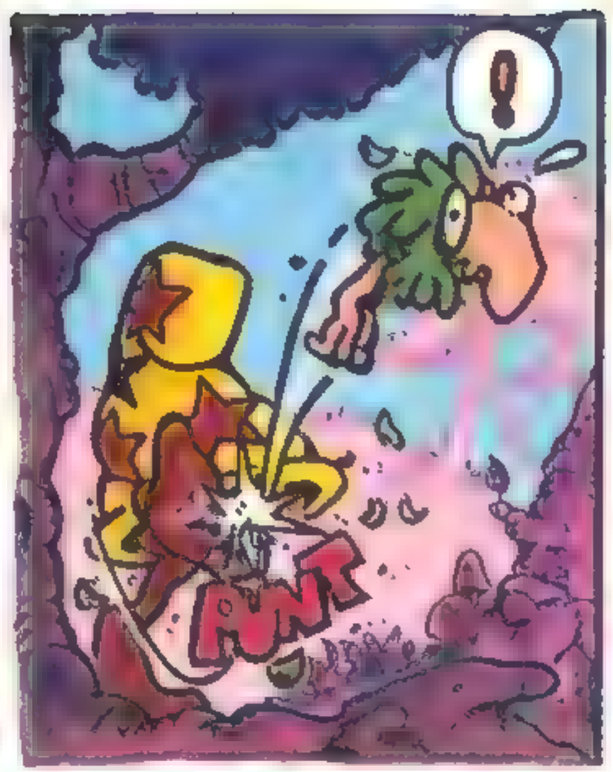
NOT ONE LOUSY SALE, . ALL I MADE WAS A NICKEL FOR CARRYIN' A "EAT AT ELF'S DINER" SIGN..

AN I LOST ALL OF THAT BETTING ON THE FROG RACE. .

I IS A CREATIVE GENIUS, A ONCE IN A MELLINIUM HAT, BUT I CAN'T SELL EVEN ONE OF MY TRICKS.
?

HOLY TOLEDO! A TALKING HAT DAT DOES MAGICAL TRICKS!!

HEY, HAT, DO A TRICK.
SURE, FLEABRAIN I'LL DO MY SPECIAL FIELD GOAL TRICK FOR YA'. .

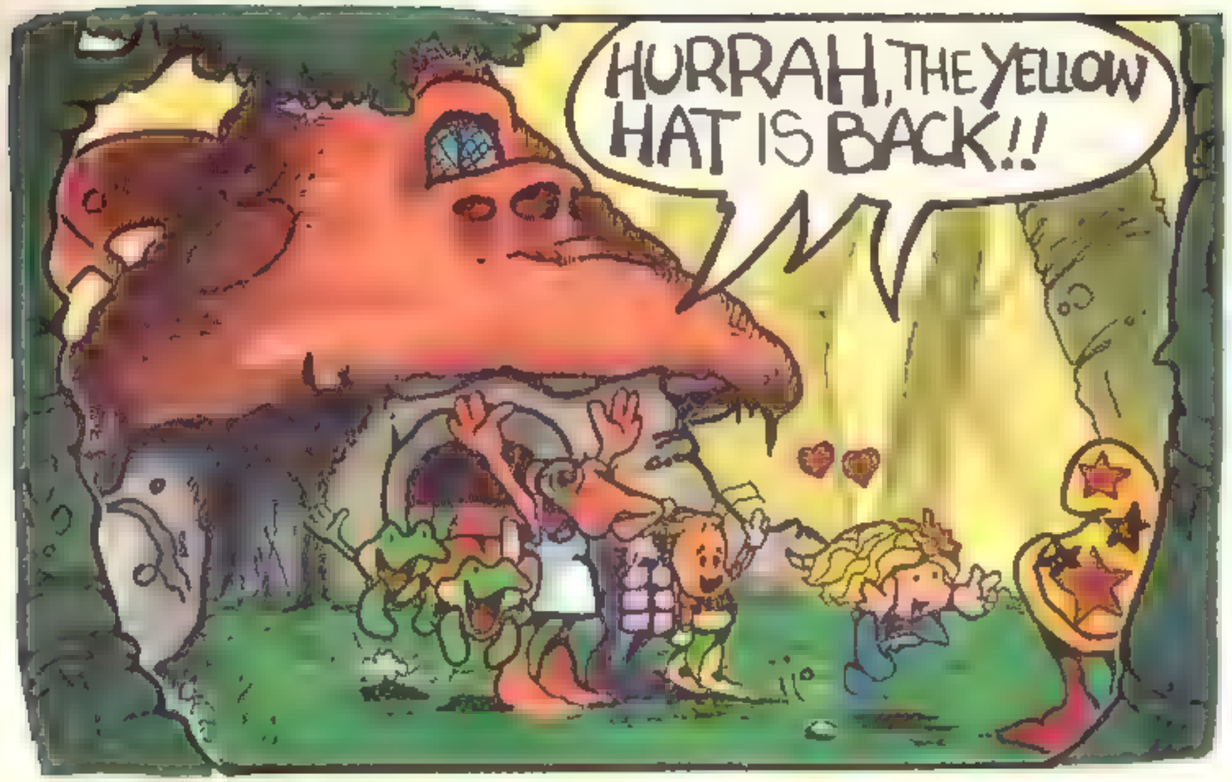

!
HUNT

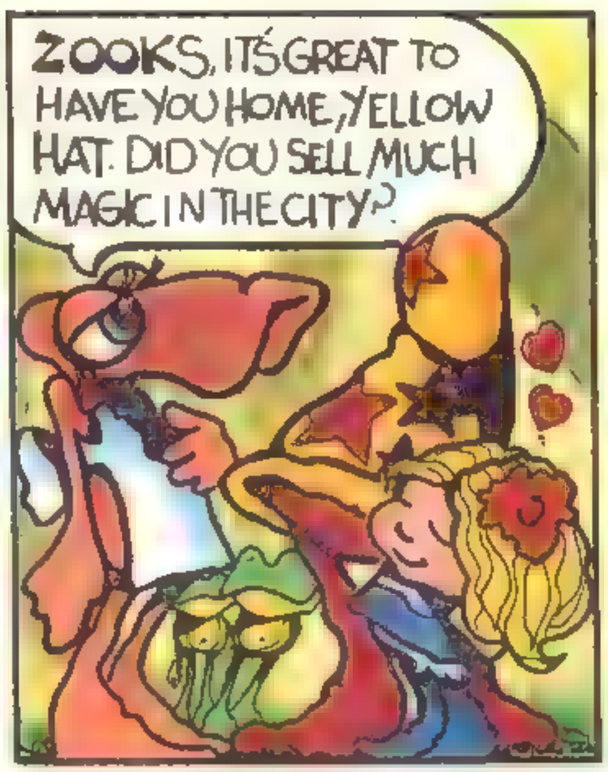
WHAT A STINKING DAY.

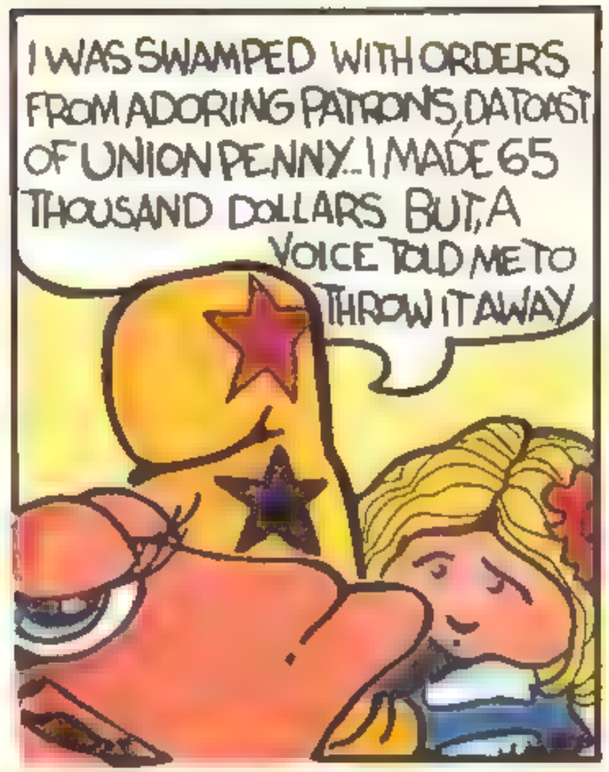
PUT YER HANDS UP BUSTER!!

I DON'T GOT NO HANDS TO PUT UP, I'M A HAT...

HOW DOES YOU STICK UP A HAT?


HURRAH, THE YELLOW HAT IS BACK!!

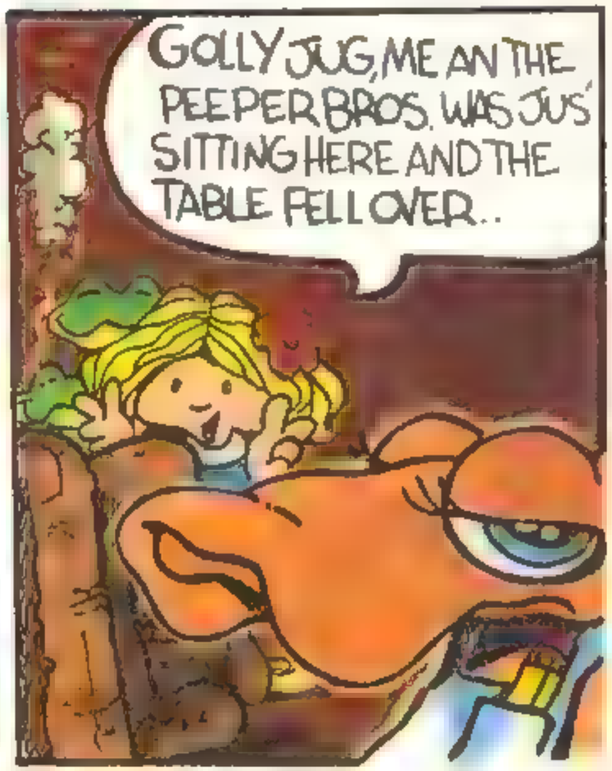

ZOOKS, IT'S GREAT TO HAVE YOU HOME, YELLOW HAT. DID YOU SELL MUCH MAGIC IN THE CITY?


I WAS SWAMPED WITH ORDERS FROM ADORING PATRONS, DA TOAST OF UNION PENNY... I MADE 65 THOUSAND DOLLARS BUT, A VOICE TOLD ME TO THROW IT AWAY

SHH, POPPY, YOU AN THE PEEPER BROS. GOT TO BE SPECIALLY QUIET. HE IS BAKING A SURPRISE CAKE FOR THE YELLOW HAT...

THE SLIGHTEST SOUND WILL MAKE THE CAKE FALL. I'LL JUS CHECK IT HERE...

BOOM


GOLLY JUG, ME AN THE PEEPER BROS. WAS JUS' SITTING HERE AND THE TABLE FELL OVER..

"THEN THE FABULOUS YELLOW HAT GOT THE 50 MILLION DOLLARS REWARD AND WAS GONNA' BE CROWNED KING OF DA WORLD, BUT.

BOY, YOU IS A GREAT HAT!

SHUT UP, PUNK, SAVE THE ADULATION TILL I IS DONE!

THE YELLOW HAT

"AND WAS GONNA' BE CROWNED KING OF DA WORLD, BUT, TURNED IT DOWN AND GAVE THE MONEY AWAY SO HE COULD STUDY AND MEDITATE IN THE MOUNTAINS."

WOW!

DICKY DO, I TOLD YOU TO OIL YOUR ARMS, THE SQUEAKIN' IS DRIVING ME NUTS.

HOW COME YOU DON'T HAVE ARMS YELLOW HAT?

WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU SAW A HAT WITH ARMS, KID. GO OIL YER APPENDAGES.

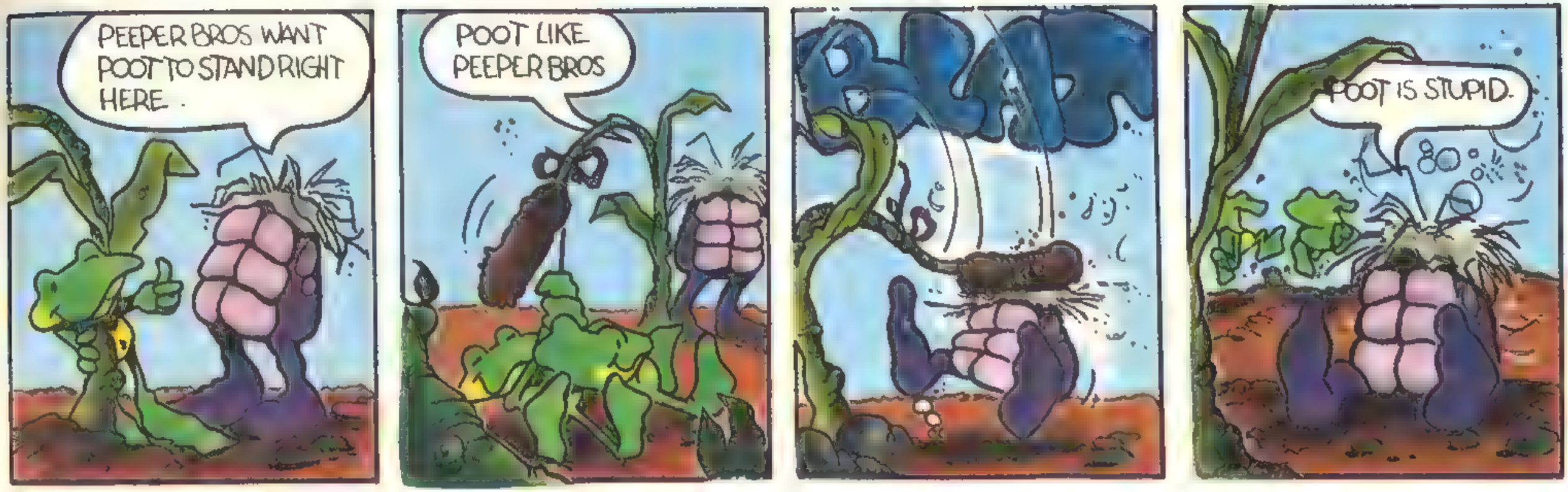
SQUEAK!

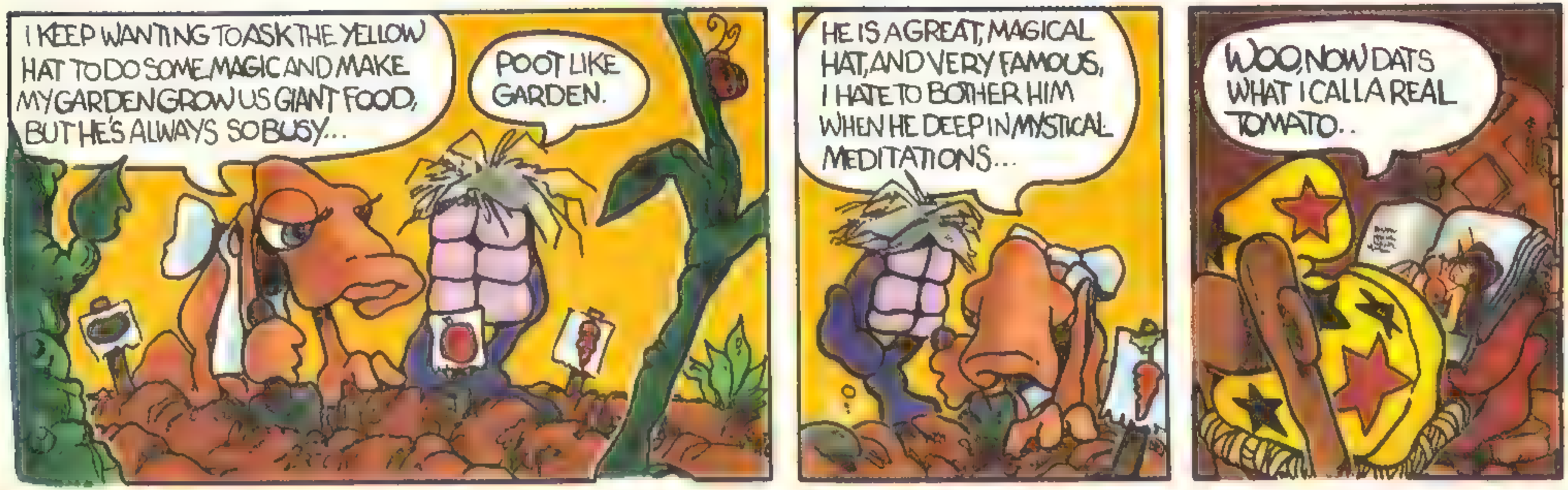
BUT, WITH ARMS, YOU CAN DO STUFF, PICK THINGS UP, CATCH BUTTERFLIES AN LIKE. THAT YOU REALLY GOT NO ARMS?

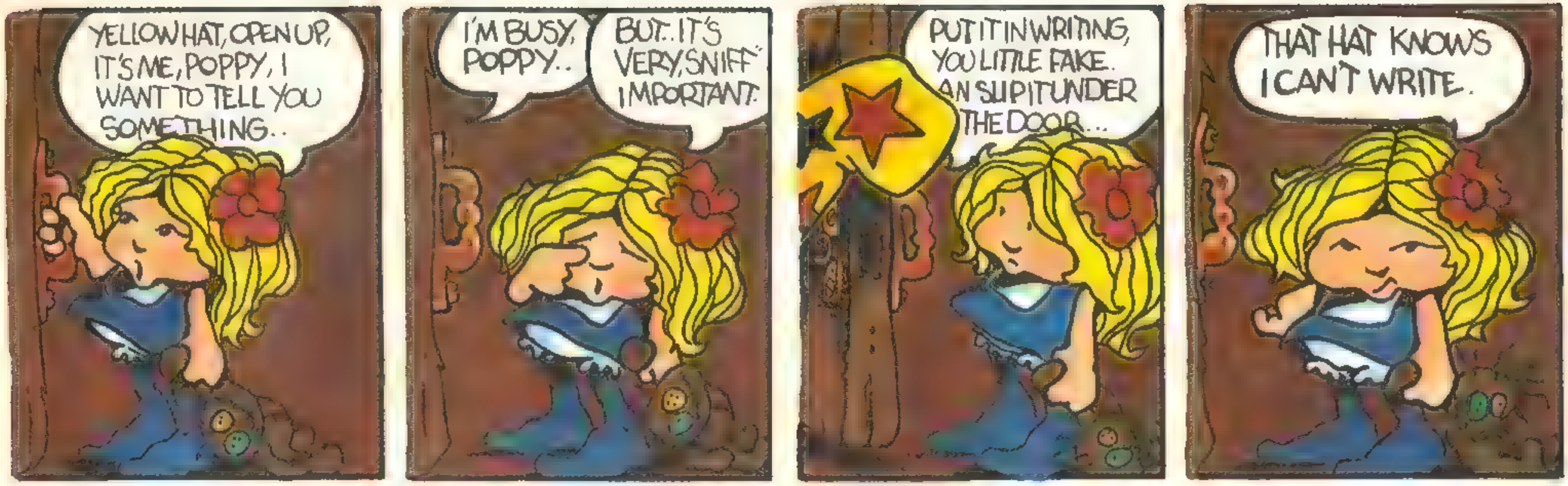
SQUEAK!

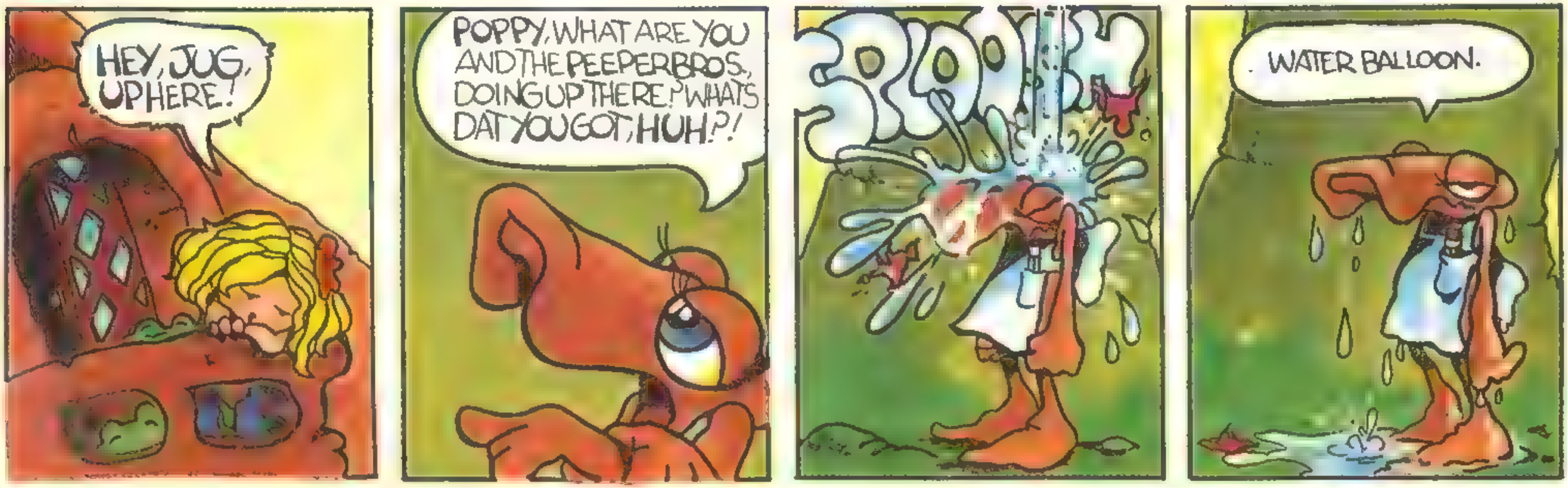
DA BOY IS TRYING TO BAIT ME INTO REVEALING SECRETS!..

?


PEEPER BROS WANT POOT TO STAND RIGHT HERE.
POOT LIKE PEEPER BROS
POOT IS STUPID.


I KEEP WANTING TO ASK THE YELLOW HAT TO DO SOME MAGIC AND MAKE MY GARDEN GROW US GIANT FOOD, BUT HE'S ALWAYS SO BUSY...
POOT LIKE GARDEN.
HE IS A GREAT, MAGICAL HAT, AND VERY FAMOUS, I HATE TO BOTHER HIM WHEN HE DEEP IN MYSTICAL MEDITATIONS...
WOO, NOW DATS WHAT I CALL A REAL TOMATO..


YELLOW HAT, OPEN UP, IT'S ME, POPPY, I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING..
I'M BUSY, POPPY..
BUT..IT'S VERY, SNIFF IMPORTANT!
PUT IT IN WRITING, YOU LITTLE FAKE. AN SLIP IT UNDER THE DOOR...
THAT HAT KNOWS I CAN'T WRITE.


HEY, JUG, UP HERE!
POPPY, WHAT ARE YOU AND THE PEEPER BROS., DOIN' UP THERE? WHAT'S DAT YOU GOT, HUH?!
SPLOOSH
WATER BALLOON.

BEFORE I READS OUR BEDTIME STORY I HAS RECEIVED A COMPLAINT DAT A COUPLE OF YOU SCREWBALLS BEEN DROPPING WATERBALLOONS ON JUG.

I WANT WHOMEVER IS DOING IT TO STOP OR YOU'LL GET SPANKED.

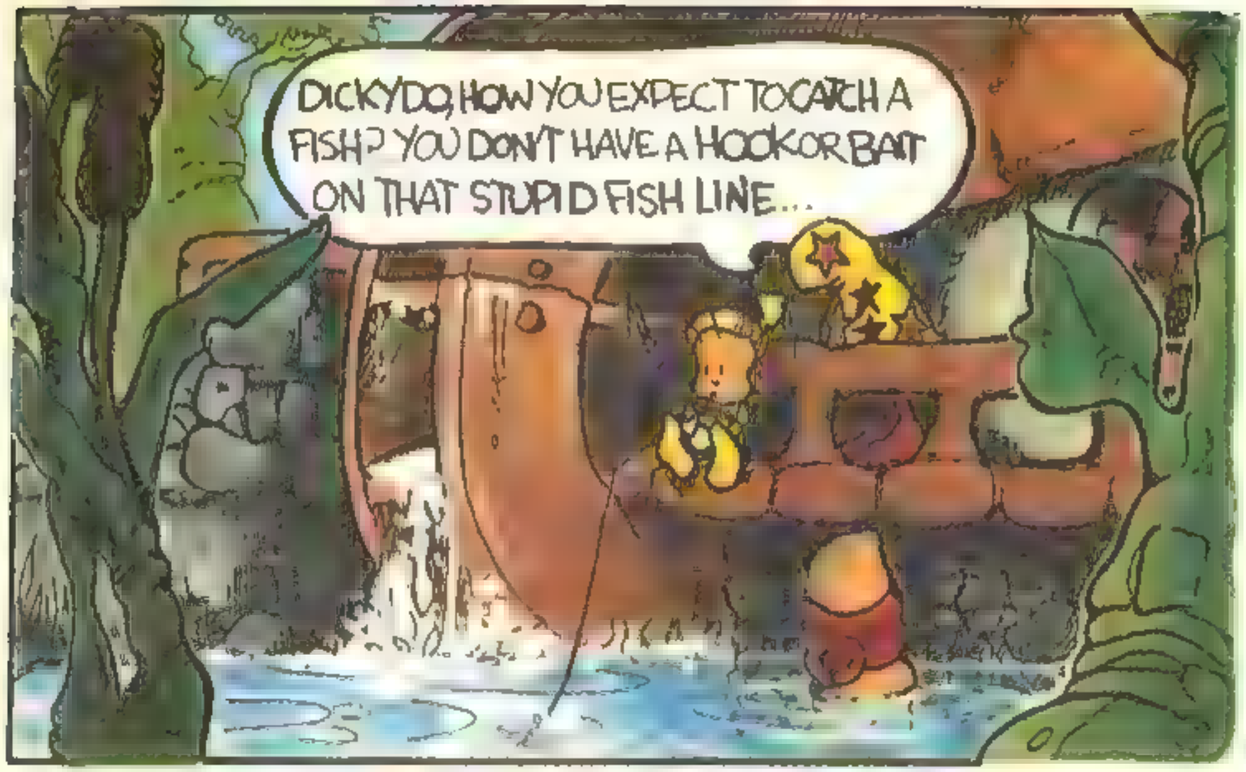
THOSE WERE MY WATERBALLOONS AND DAT'S STEALING.

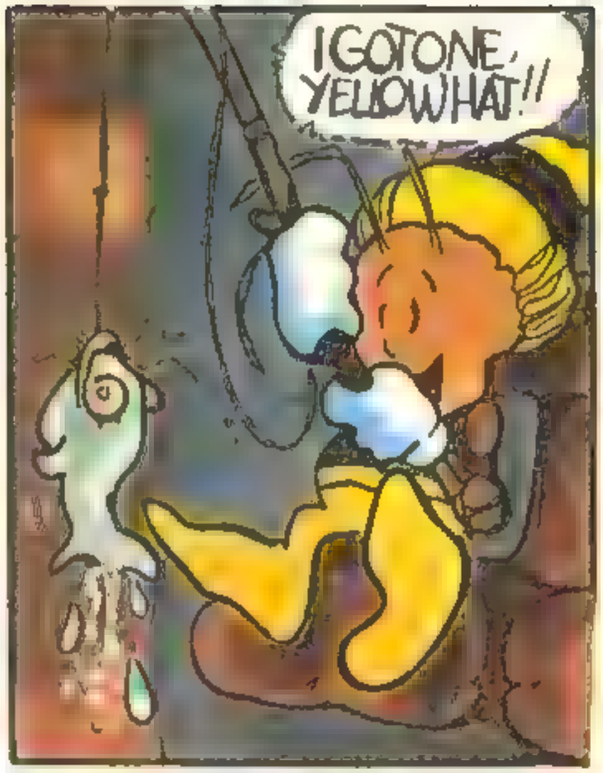
I HATE TO BRING THIS UP YELLOW HAT, BUT, YOU KNOW, I SIGNED ON TO BE YOUR APPRENTICE.

. ALL I BEEN DOING IS HOUSEWORK AN STUFF.. I NEVER EVEN SAW YOU DO REAL MAGIC

WAIT NO MORE, JUG, YOU SEE DAT SCRUFFY, MOTH-EATEN BIRD OVER THERE?

LAST WEEK HE WAS A MAGAZINE SALESMAN, I TURNED HIM INTO A BIRD.


DICKYDO, HOW YOU EXPECT TO CATCH A FISH? YOU DON'T HAVE A HOOK OR BAIT ON THAT STUPID FISH LINE...


I GOT ONE, YELLOW HAT!!

A MANIC-DEPRESSIVE CATFISH COMMITTING SUICIDE DOESN'T COUNT!

POOT LIKE PEEPER BROS.
GLOP GLOP
HONEY

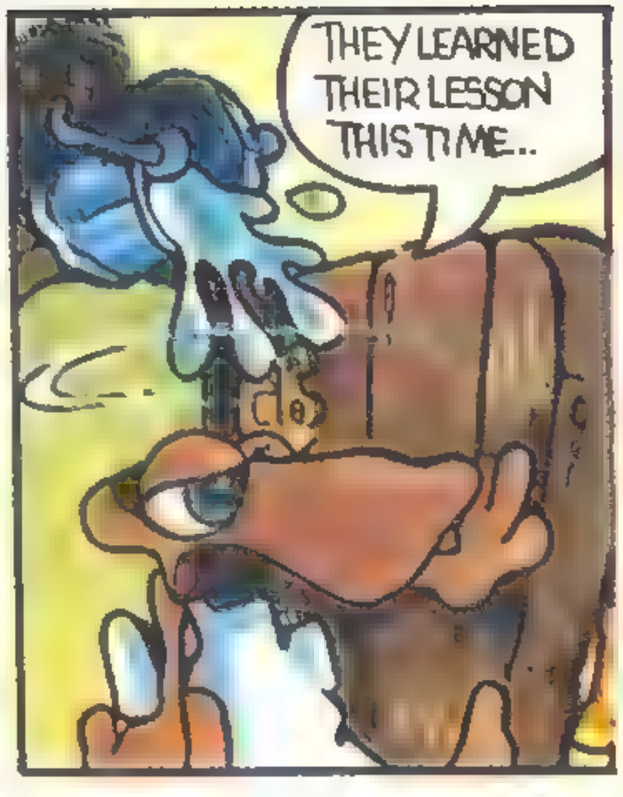
PEEPER BROS. MAKE POOT HANDSOME
FLUMP

JUG.
HUM?

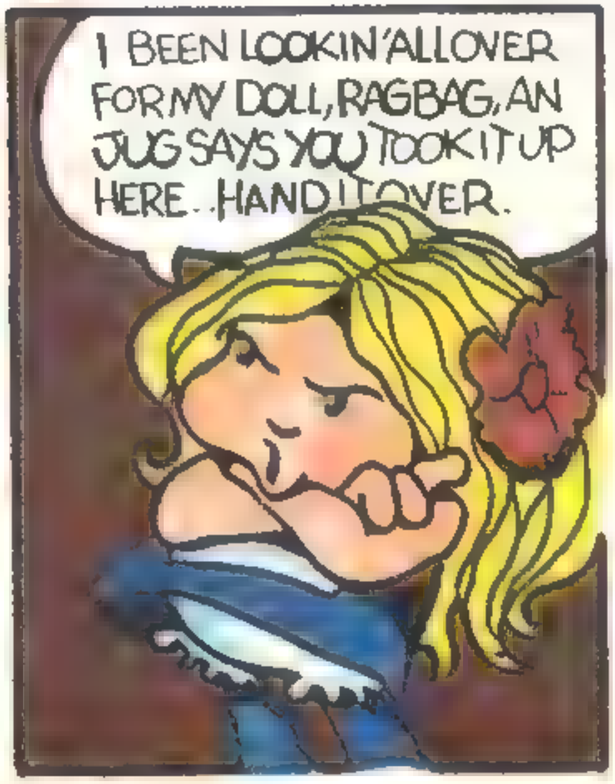
PEEPER BROS. MAKE POOT HANDSOME..

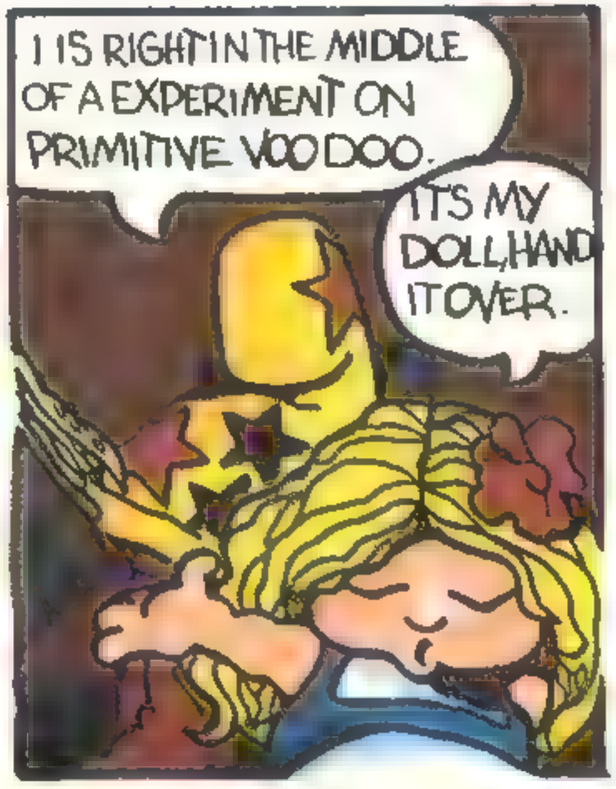
OW OW WAAAA!!
SPANK SPANK

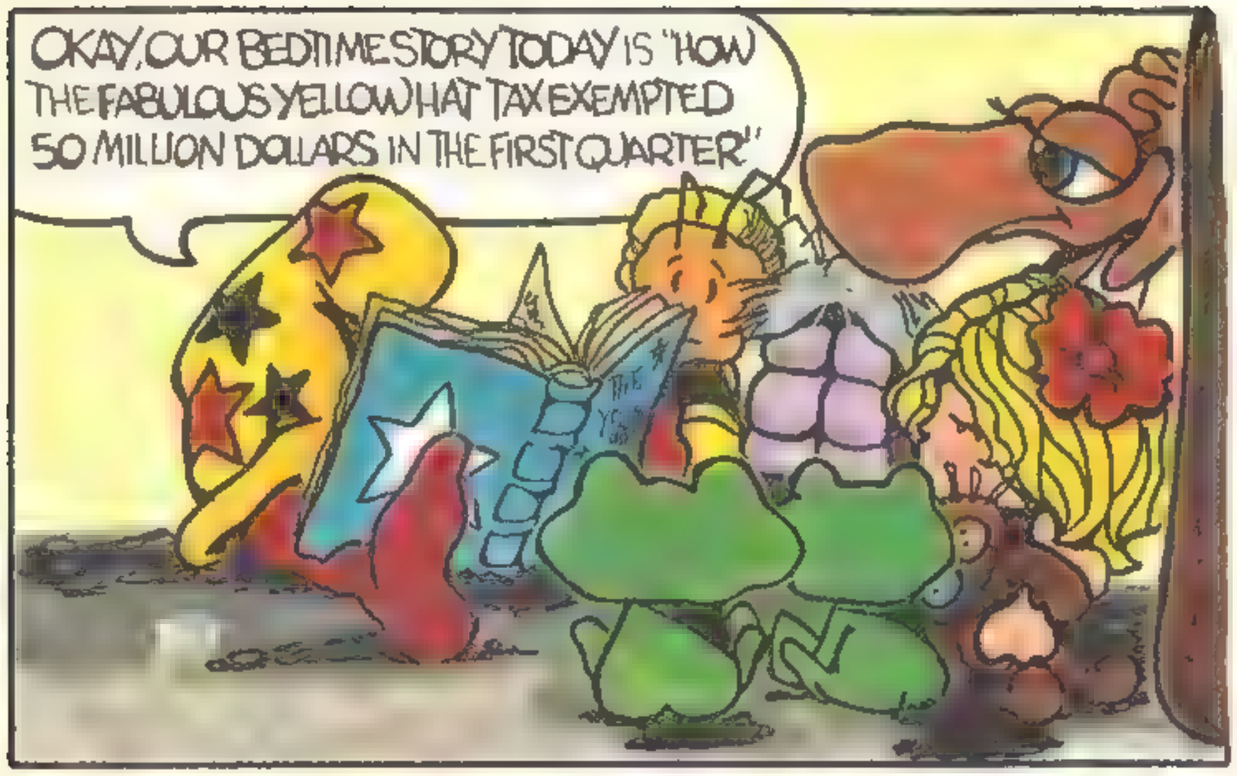
I'LL LET YOU GO NOW, BUT NO MORE FUNNY BUSINESS PEEPER BROS. UNDERSTAND?!
WAA!

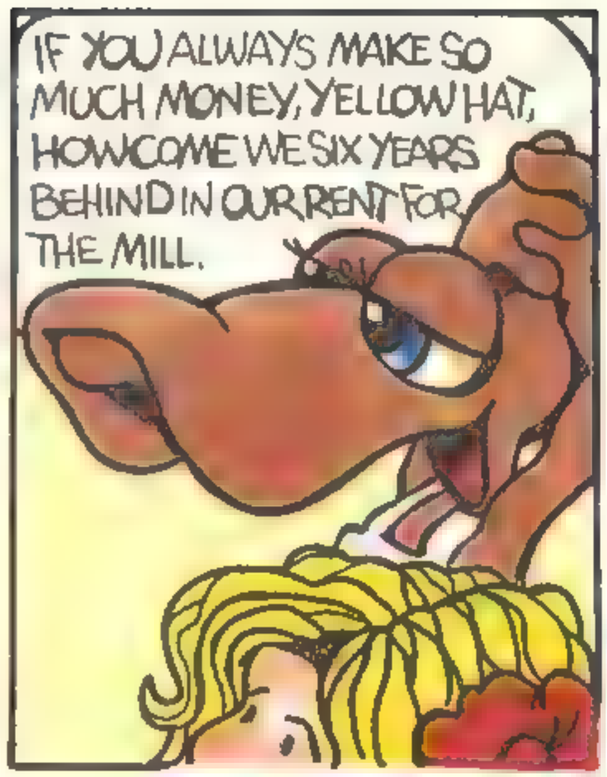

THEY LEARNED THEIR LESSON THIS TIME..

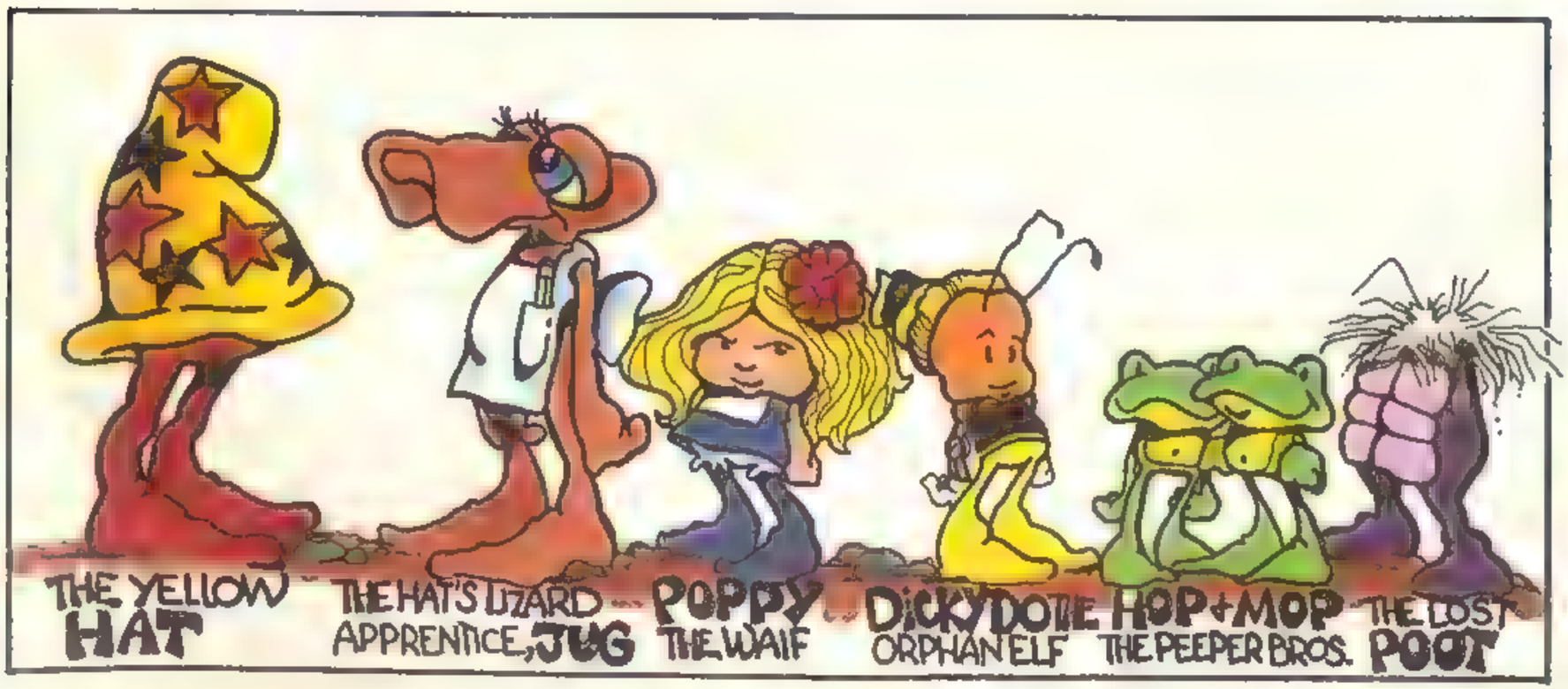
POPPY, YER NOT SUPPOSE TO COME IN MY STUDY/LAB, BEAT IT, OR I'LL CAST A SPELL ON YOU.

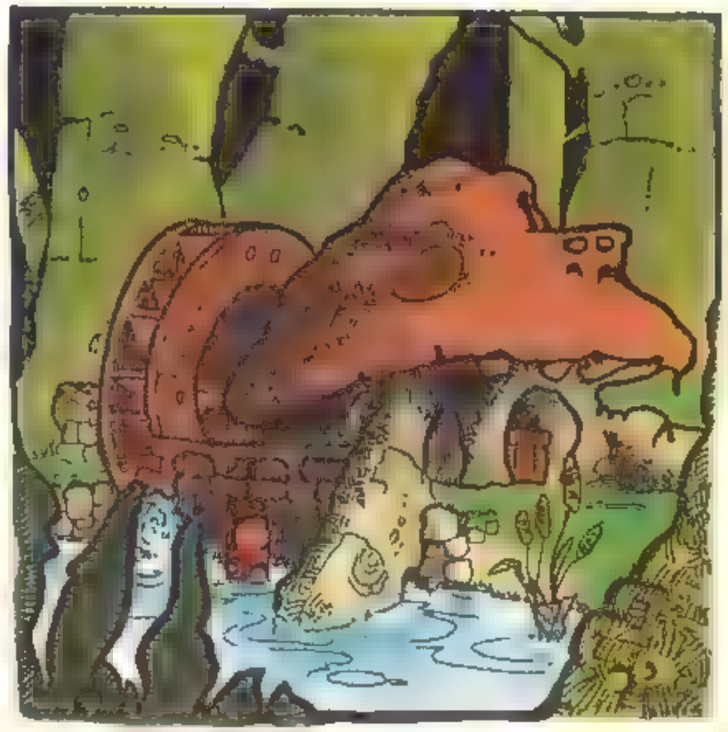

I BEEN LOOKIN' ALL OVER FOR MY DOLL, RAGBAG, AN JUG SAYS YOU TOOK IT UP HERE.. HAND IT OVER.


I IS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A EXPERIMENT ON PRIMITIVE VOODOO.
ITS MY DOLL, HAND IT OVER.

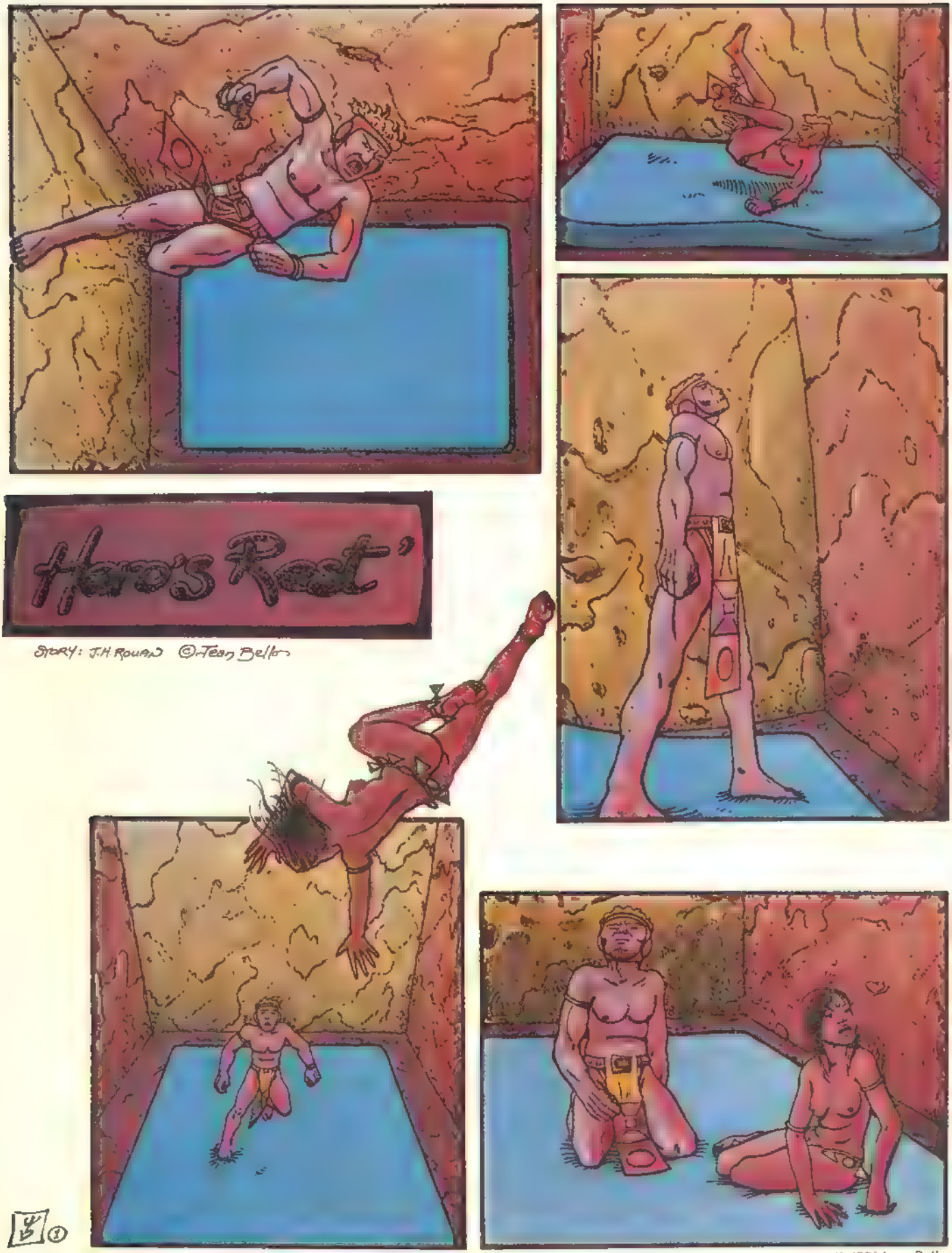




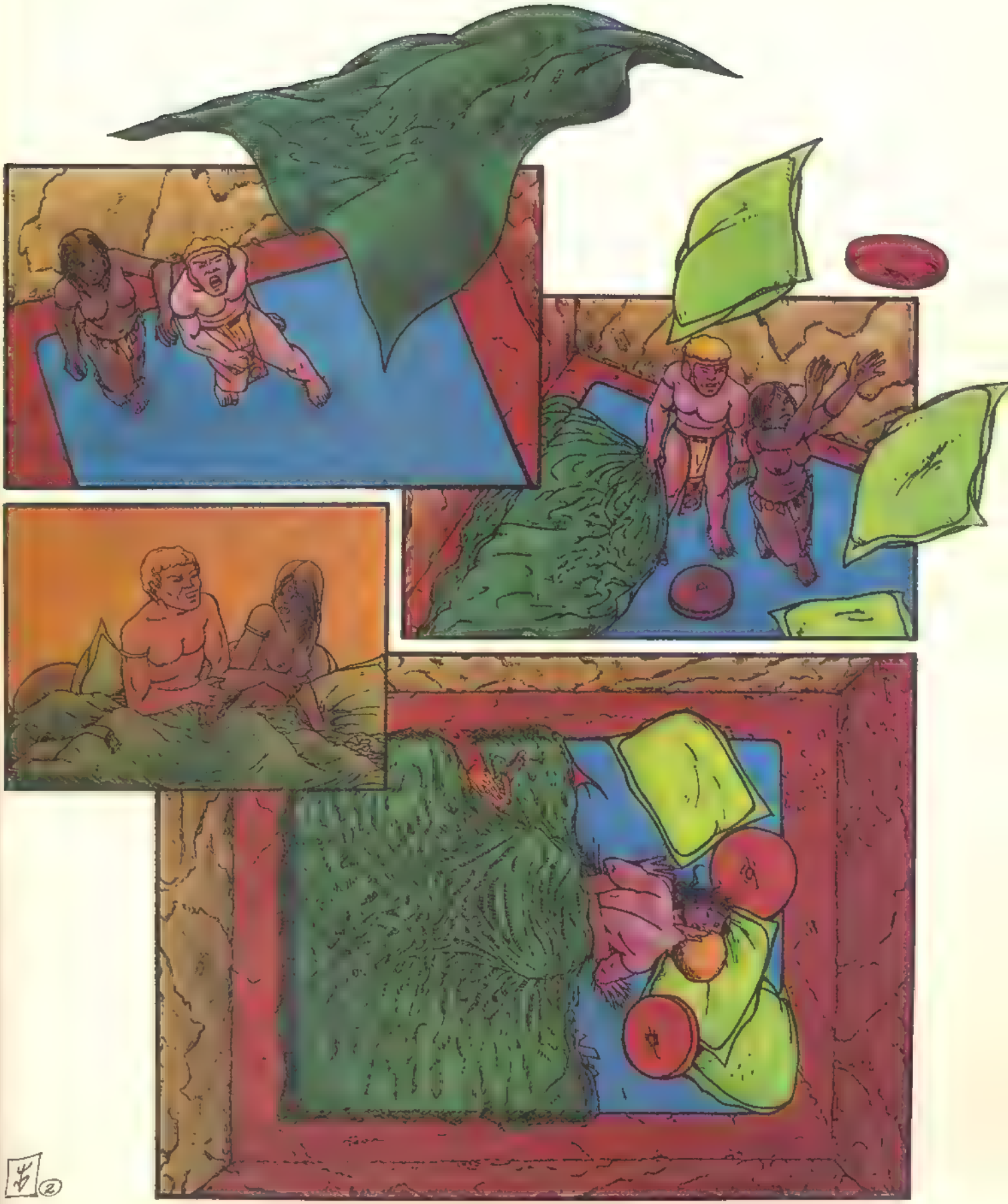




MUSHROOM MILL ON CRICKET'S POND



© 1983 Jean Bello

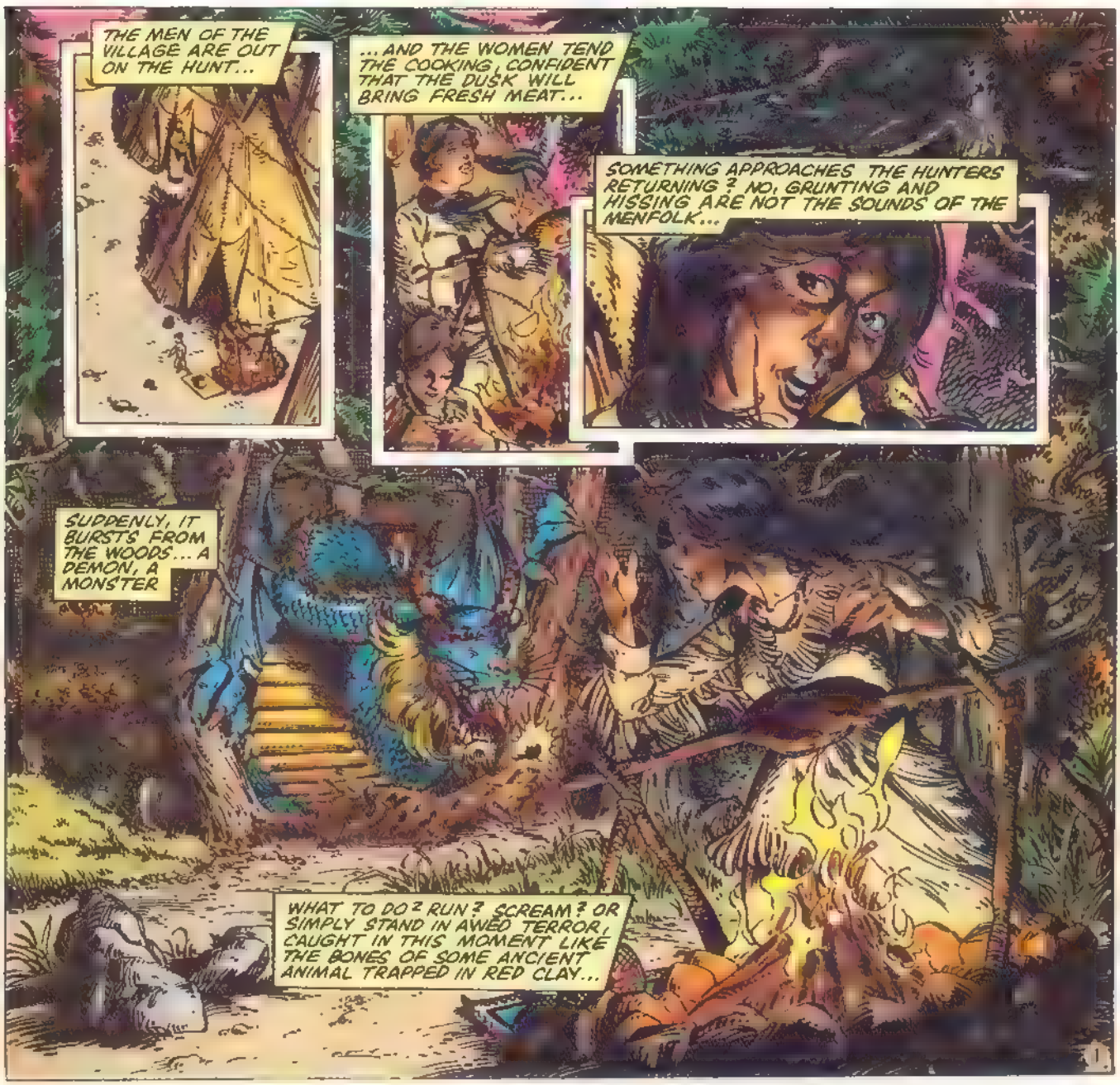


CHAPTER FIVE:
THE MEETING

Last of the Dragons

CREATED & PLOTTED BY CARL POTTS
ART BY CARL POTTS & TERRY AUSTIN
SCRIPT BY DENNY O'NEIL
COLORS BY MARIE SEVERIN
LETTERS BY JIM NOVAK

FROM THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN, THEY CAME: SAVAGE RENEGADE PRIESTS AND THE LAST OF THE DRAGONS, WHOSE PEACEFUL NATURES HAVE BEEN SUBVERTED TO THEIR MASTERS' LUST FOR POWER. NOW THEY STALK THE NORTH AMERICAN WILDERNESS, READY TO BEGIN THEIR CONQUEST.


THE MEN OF THE VILLAGE ARE OUT ON THE HUNT...
...AND THE WOMEN TEND THE COOKING, CONFIDENT THAT THE DUSK WILL BRING FRESH MEAT...
SOMETHING APPROACHES THE HUNTERS RETURNING? NO, GRUNTING AND HISSING ARE NOT THE SOUNDS OF THE MENFOLK...
SUDDENLY, IT BURSTS FROM THE WOODS... A DEMON, A MONSTER
WHAT TO DO? RUN? SCREAM? OR SIMPLY STAND IN AWED TERROR, CAUGHT IN THIS MOMENT LIKE THE BONES OF SOME ANCIENT ANIMAL TRAPPED IN RED CLAY...

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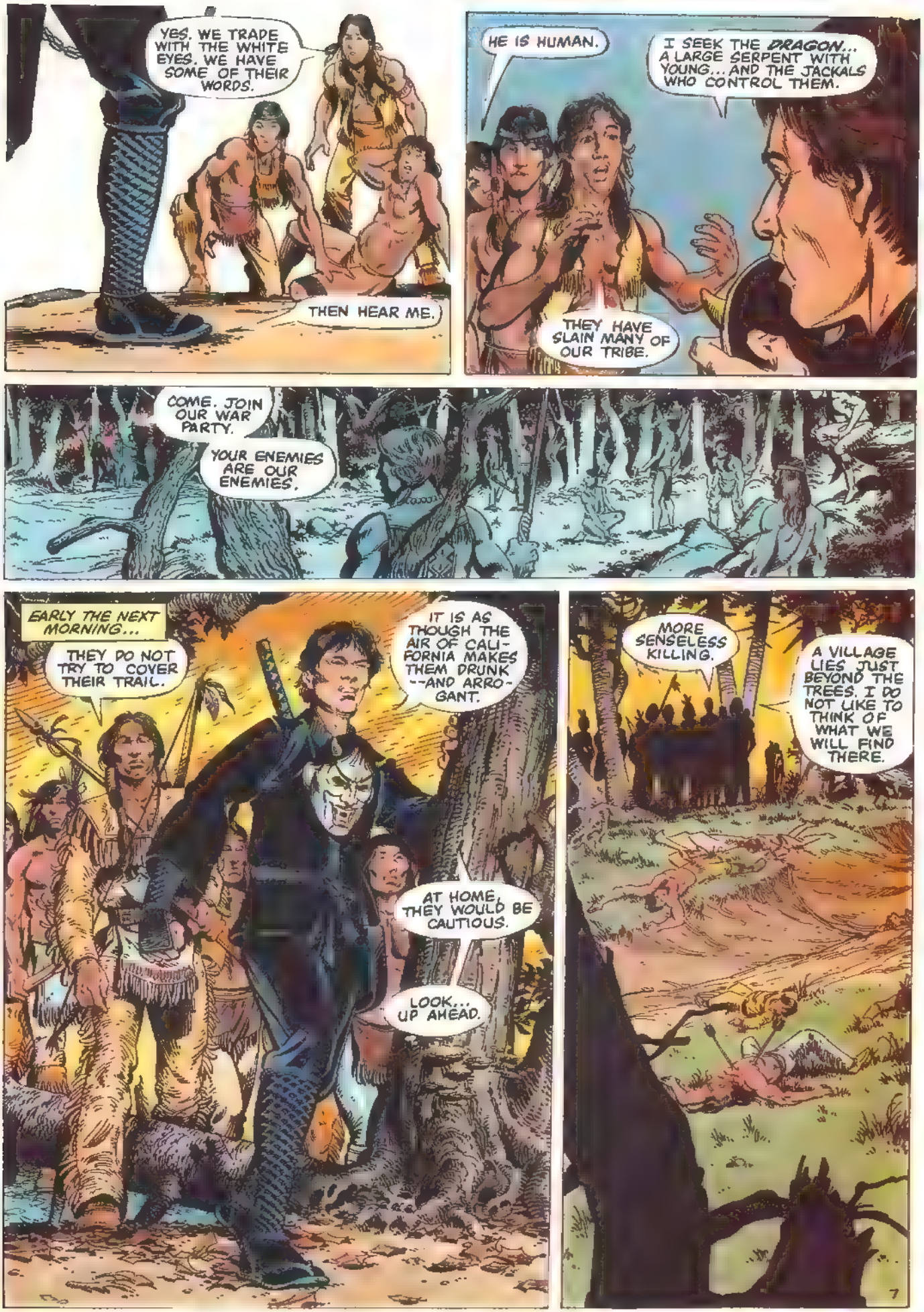
THERE ARE ONLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN
NO MATTER KILL THEM.
SWIFTLY, METHODICALLY, RUTHLESSLY, THE JAPANESE BLOODY THEIR WEAPONS--
--WHILE THE DRAGON FROLICS MERCILESSLY, DOING AS IT HAS BEEN TRAINED TO DO.
THE SURVIVORS WILL TELL A TALE OF TERROR, AND THAT WILL WIN THE NEXT BATTLE BEFORE IT BEGINS: SO THINK THE PRIESTS.
AND THUS IT IS. THE MEN MUST BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE OFFENDED A TERRIBLE GOD, AND THEIR LAMENTS RISE INTO THE DARKENING SKY.
MEANWHILE, A YOUNG NINJA FOLLOWS THE TRAIL OF THE DRAGONS THROUGH THE FOREST AS HE HAS FOLLOWED THEM ACROSS THE GREAT OCEAN. TAKASHI'S NEED TO AVENGE THE DEATH OF HIS BELOVED PULSES WITHIN HIM.
ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOT SLEPT SINCE ARRIVING IN THIS PLACE, THIS CALIFORNIA, HIS TRAINING HAS NOT DESERTED HIM. HE SENSES HE IS BEING PURSUED.

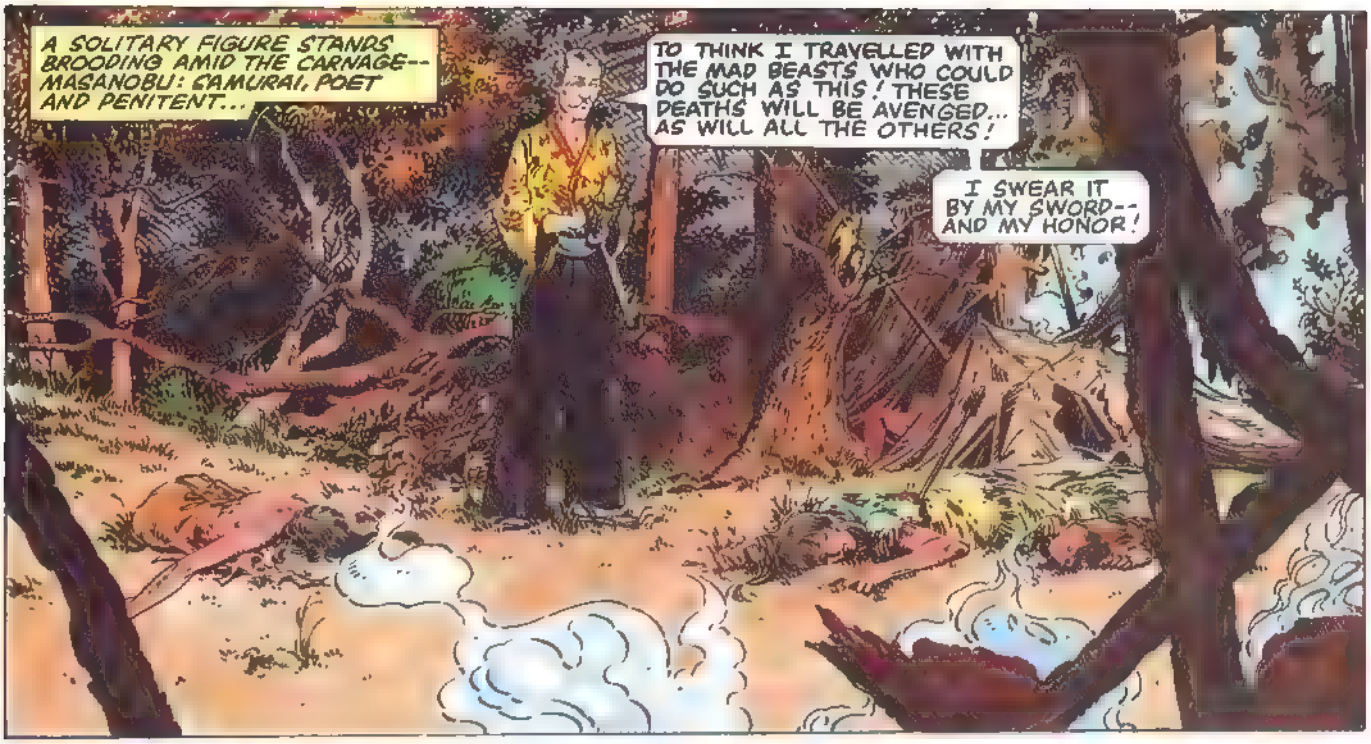
A MOMENT LATER, THE SHARP CRACK OF A FIREARM CONFIRMS HIS SUSPICIONS...
HE HAS BEEN SEEN BY THE COPPER-SKINNED NATIVES AND THEY ARE NOT FRIENDLY.
SNAPPED TWIGS TO CREATE A FALSE TRAIL--
--AND THE DEMON MASK TO INSTILL SURPRISE AND, PERHAPS, FEAR.
HE DOES NOT WISH TO KILL HIS PURSUERS, FOR THEY MAY BE ABLE TO HELP HIM. THEY MAY ALREADY KNOW WHERE THE DRAGONS ARE.
BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THEY MEAN HIM HARM.
AND THAT, FIRST, HE MUST DEAL WITH
THREE OF THEM. STRONG AND LITHE. WARRIORS. IT MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE TO LET THEM LIVE. HE WILL KNOW WITHIN MOMENTS.

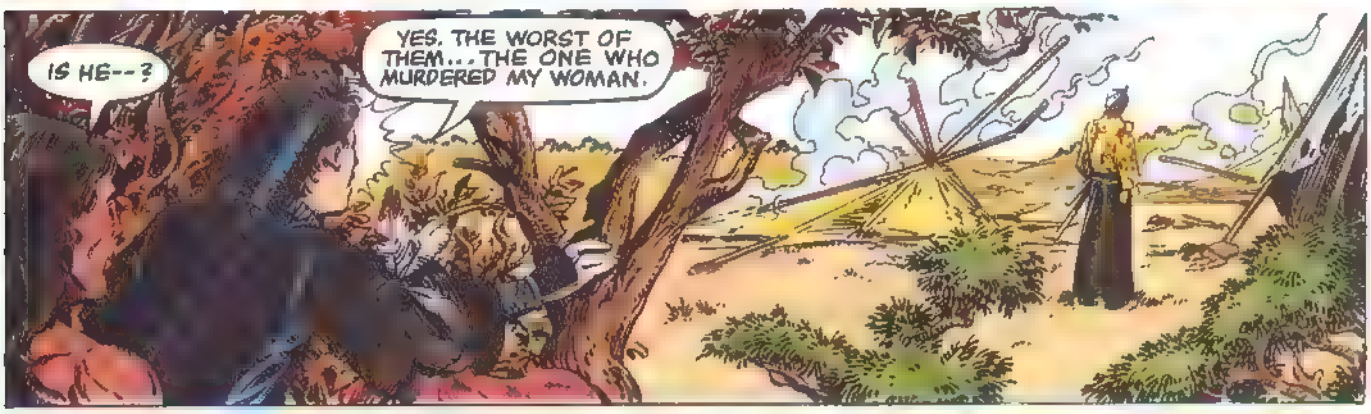
A FAINT RUSTLE OF CLOTH AND LEAVES AND A SUDDEN SHADOW--
THEN, A SHRIEK--
KI-YEAHH!!
4
INFINITELY VARIABLE ARE NINJA TECHNIQUES, AND INFINITELY ADAPTABLE--AS SERVICEABLE HERE IN THE NEW WORLD AS THEY WOULD BE IN THE OLD. TAKASHI IS A SWIFT, STRIKING DEVIL--

--ONE WHO VANISHES ALMOST IMMEDIATELY IN A CLOUD OF SMOKE.
WHERE DID IT GO?
WHERE DID HE GO?
INTO THE BRUSH. IF WE CALL OURSELVES BRAVES, WE MUST FOLLOW
HOWEVER, TAKASHI'S SPOOR IS CONFUSING...
THE FOOTPRINTS HEAD IN TWO DIRECTIONS AT ONCE.
SHOULD WE SEPARATE?
NO. A SINGLE MAN WOULD BE HELPLESS AGAINST THAT...
...THAT NAMELESS THING!
BEHIND HIS MASK, TAKASHI ALLOWS HIMSELF A SMILE...
REACHING A FAVORABLE POSITION, HE PRODUCES HIS KUSI-GAMA, BREATHES DEEPLY AND PERMITS HIS BODY TO BEGIN THE ACTIONS IT KNOWS WELL.
...AND MOVES, EMPLOYING THE SIDE STEP WHICH HAS SO BEFUDDLED HIS OPPONENTS.
IN THE PAST, HE HAS WONDERED WHETHER HIS TRAINING IS AS GOOD AS HIS MASTERS CLAIMED. IT IS.

THE TRAIL ENDS.
DO WE CHASE SOME SORT OF BIRD?
WHAT IS THIS--?
MY LEG--!
IT HAS STRUCK DOWN MY MATES. BUT I HAVE MY BOW--
WALK
AIEEE
STOP!
DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE... THE ENGLISH TONGUE?
HE SPEAKS A LANGUAGE HE DID NOT REALIZE HE REMEMBERS --THE LANGUAGE OF THE DRUNKEN BRUTE WHO WAS HIS FATHER.


YES. WE TRADE WITH THE WHITE EYES. WE HAVE SOME OF THEIR WORDS.
THEN HEAR ME.
HE IS HUMAN.
I SEEK THE DRAGON... A LARGE SERPENT WITH YOUNG... AND THE JACKALS WHO CONTROL THEM.
THEY HAVE SLAIN MANY OF OUR TRIBE.
COME. JOIN OUR WAR PARTY.
YOUR ENEMIES ARE OUR ENEMIES.
EARLY THE NEXT MORNING...
THEY DO NOT TRY TO COVER THEIR TRAIL.
IT IS AS THOUGH THE AIR OF CALIFORNIA MAKES THEM DRUNK --AND ARROGANT.
AT HOME, THEY WOULD BE CAUTIOUS.
LOOK... UP AHEAD.
MORE SENSELESS KILLING.
A VILLAGE LIES JUST BEYOND THE TREES. I DO NOT LIKE TO THINK OF WHAT WE WILL FIND THERE.
7


A SOLITARY FIGURE STANDS BROODING AMID THE CARNAGE-- MASANOBU: SAMURAI, POET AND PENITENT...
TO THINK I TRAVELLED WITH THE MAD BEASTS WHO COULD DO SUCH AS THIS! THESE DEATHS WILL BE AVENGED... AS WILL ALL THE OTHERS!
I SWEAR IT BY MY SWORD-- AND MY HONOR!



THE LAST OF THE DRAGONS continues next issue

IN THE MIDST OF COLOSSAL AERIAL BUILDINGS A RAIN FALLS. IN THIS CITY YOU CAN CATCH IT IN YOUR HANDS. RAIN AS WARM AS TEARS. SILENCE REIGNS IN ITS WINDOWS. SPELLBOUND APPARITIONS

HE SMILED QUIETLY

PERHAPS YOU'VE SEEN THIS CITY, AND NEVER SAY A WORD. IT'S THE CITY IN THE MIRROR. WHERE YOU SAW REFLECTION THERE WAS DUPLICITY. AND YES, YOU WERE RIGHT, IT IS COLD WHERE YOU CAN'T SEE.

HE CLOSED HIS EYES AND MOVED HIS LIPS

GHOSTS AND WHITE HORSES DANCE IN SLOW CIRCLES THROUGH THE ABANDONED SQUARES, HYPNOTIZING THE NIGHT. A WIND, MADE BY A THOUSAND UNSEEN CREATURES FLYING, RUFFLES YOUR HAIR LIKE AN ANGRY HAND

HE COULD SEE HIS BREATH IN THE AIR

THE COOLNESS OF STONE. DEAD AND GOLD PILLARS LISTEN. LAUGHTER ECHOING IN THE HAUNTED FILIGREE. DIAPHANOUS STAIRWAYS LEADING NOWHERE. CURTAINS OF SLOW MOTION LACE AND NIGHTMARES WAVE TO YOU FROM THE WINDOWS.

"THIS IS WHERE SHE IS NOW" HE LAUGHED

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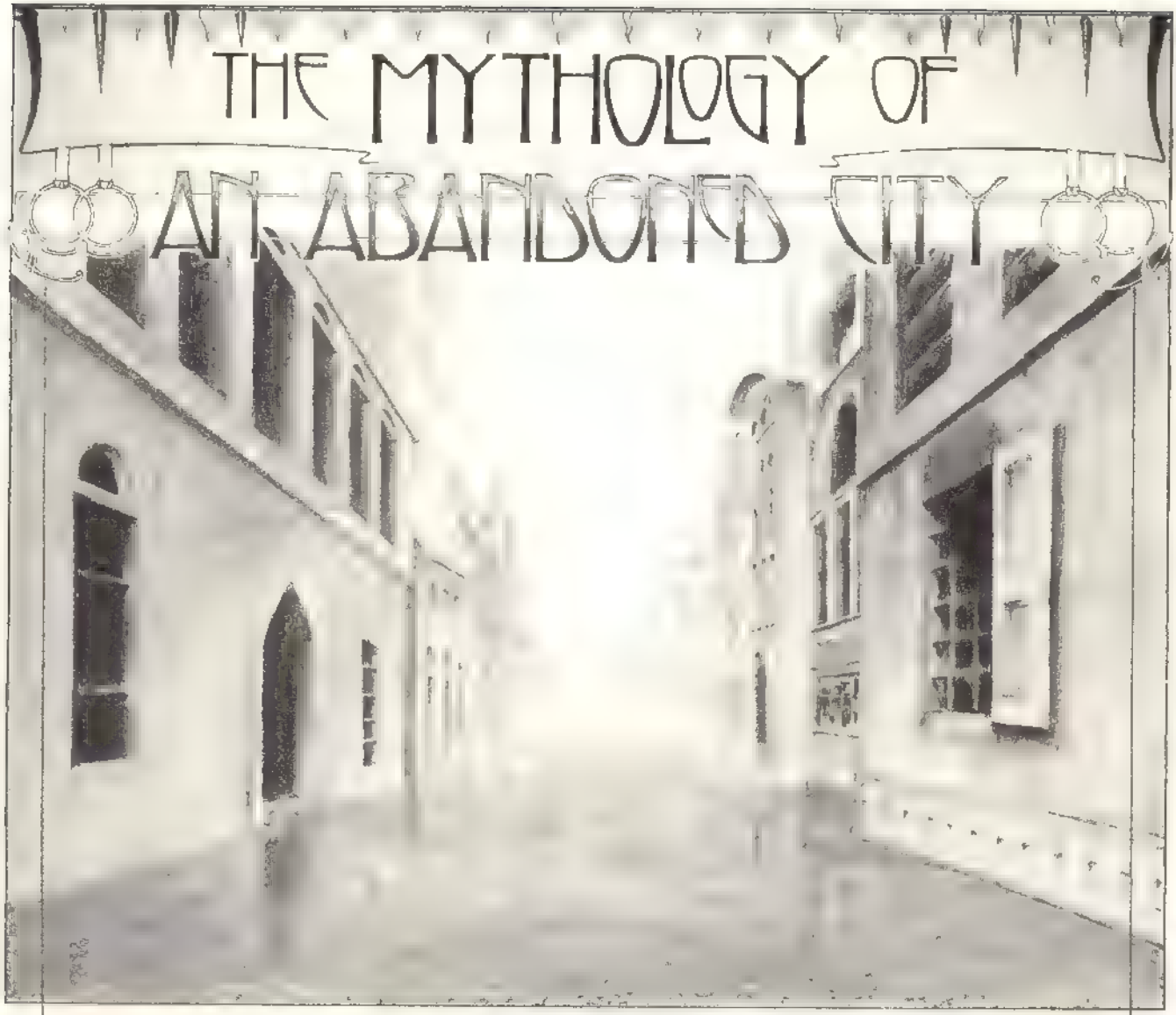
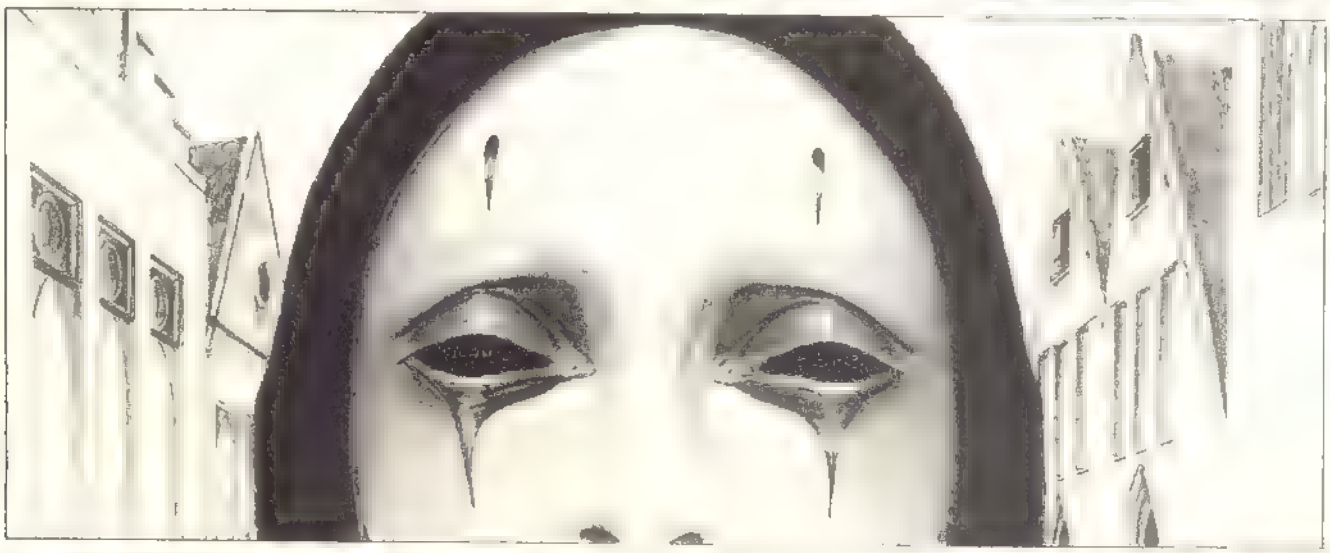
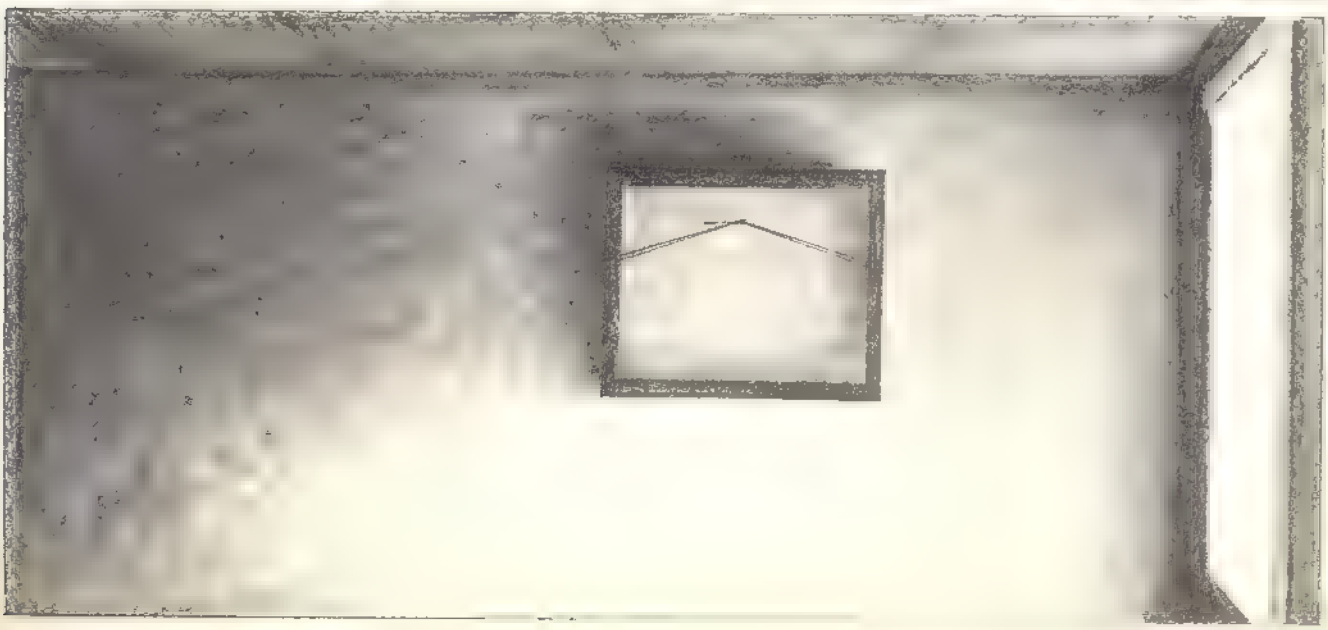
THE MYTHOLOGY OF AN ABANDONED CITY



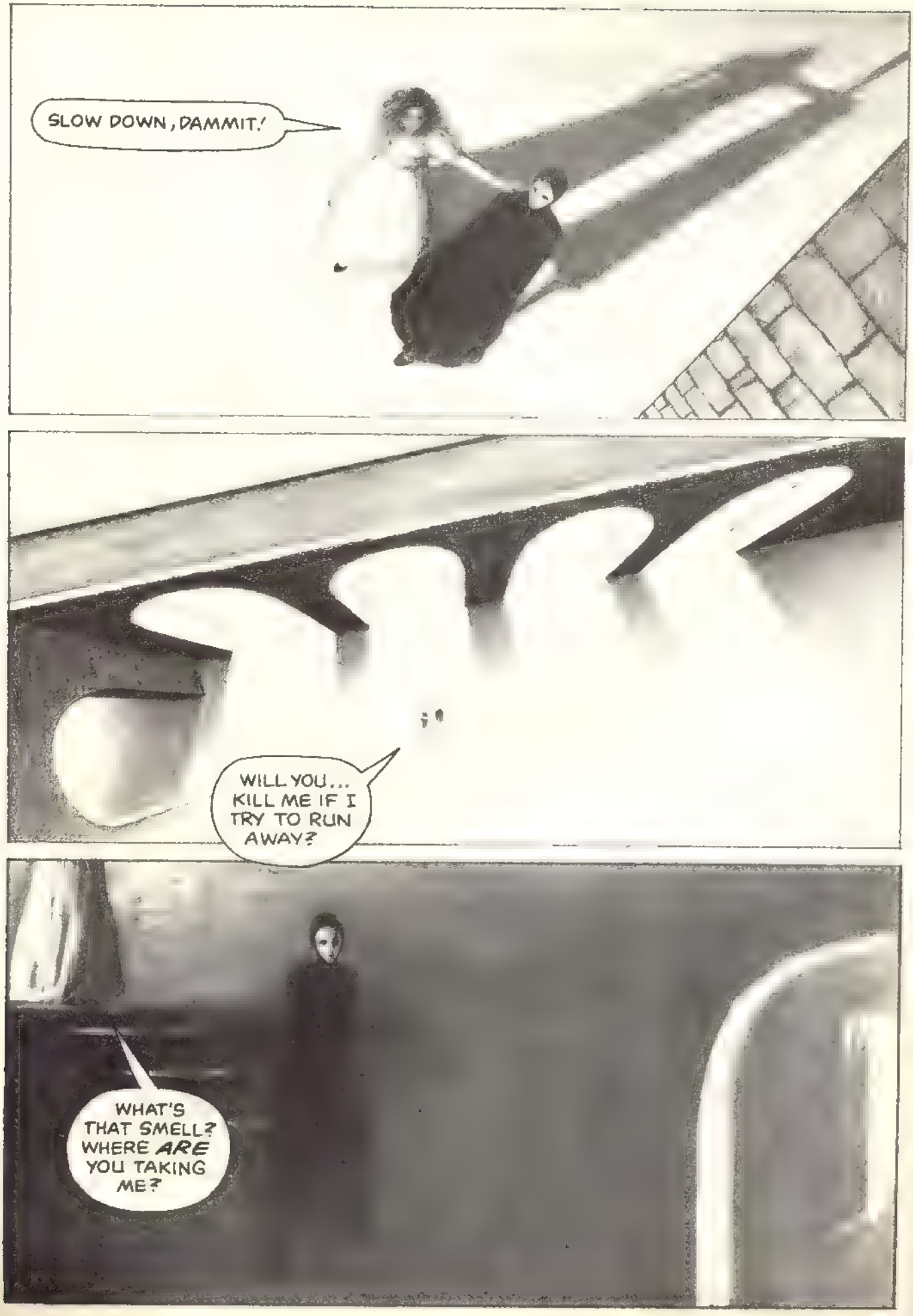
THE SLEEPWALKER



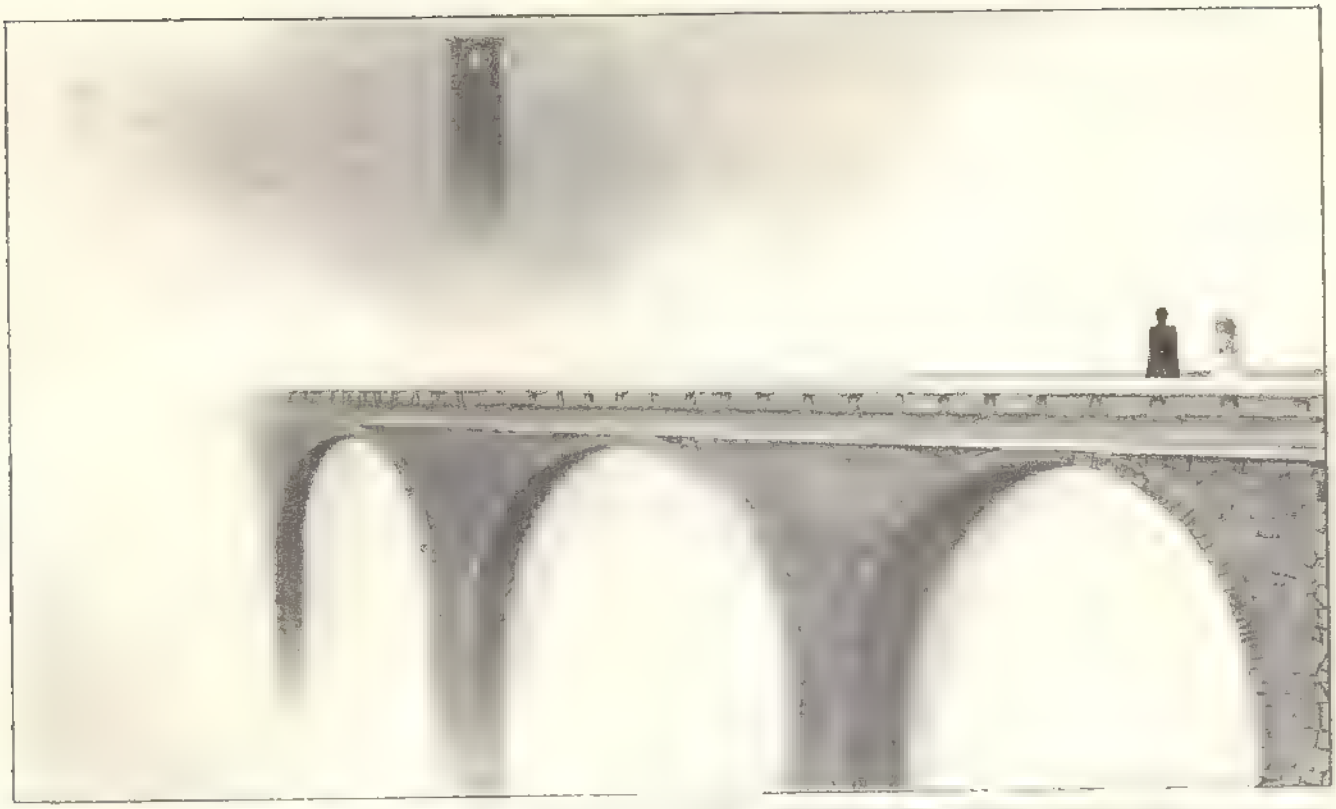


KRAK

THAT BOY BACK THERE, HE KNEW YOU, DIDN'T HE? I COULD TELL. WHO ARE YOU?


SLOW DOWN, DAMMIT!
WILL YOU... KILL ME IF I TRY TO RUN AWAY?
WHAT'S THAT SMELL? WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

OH, MY GOD...



AND, PERHAPS SURPRISINGLY, THE GENTLEMAN WITH A SOMEWHAT VACANT STARE TURNS TO HIS RELUCTANT COMPANION, ABSENTLY ASKING IF SHE ENJOYS PARTIES.
IF SHE HEARS, HE CAN'T TELL. HIS VOICE, SHE THINKS, IS LIKE AN ECHO WITHOUT SOUND FIRST.
HER FINGERS SHIVER AS SHE HEARS A SOUL CREEP OUT OF THE TOWER SCREAMING,
'COME HERE...
COME HERE, LITTLE ONE.'

END OF PART ONE.

YOU HEARD ME, BACHELARD!
I SAID STOP THIS INSTANT!
VIX, MY LOVE--YOU MIGHT AS WELL ASK ME TO CONTROL THE WILD BEATING OF MY HEART!
THE MERE THOUGHT OF YOU SENDS ME INTO A GALLOP!
I'M NOT ASKING...
I'M TELLING YOU!
UUNNGH!
Y-YES, MY BELOVED.
BOSSY
©
1982 RICK VEITCH
YOU KNOW I CAN'T STAND ALL THAT RUNNING AND BOUNCING AROUND! I WAS MEANT FOR FINER THINGS!
I DON'T KNOW WHY I EVER TOOK UP WITH YOU...?
BUT, MY JEWEL, YOU KNOW FULL WELL HOW I DEFEATED SPUD THE HIPPOGRYPH IN FAIR COMBAT FOR YOUR HAND!
FROM THE FIRST MOMENT I GAZED UPON YOU I KNEW...
...NOTHING COULD KEEP A LOVE SUCH AS OURS FROM BEING FULFILLED!

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HMMMPH!
I HAPPENED TO LIKE SPUD.
HE KNEW HOW TO TREAT A LADY!
OH, SHUT UP, BACHELARD.
YOU BORE ME SO.
{CHOKE}
NOW GO GET ME A BOUQET OF FLOWERS...
I'M GOING TO WANT TO DO MY HAIR AFTER MY BATH.
YES, MY SWEET!
SHE LOVES ME... SHE LOVES ME NOT. SHE LOVES ME... SHE LOVES ME NOT.
SHE LOVES ME...?
HEL-LOOO!

I'M VIX... WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
GRUNT!
OOOOH, WHAT A MASCULINE NAME!
I JUST LOVE BIG HORNS...
UNHAND HER, FOUL BEAST OF THE PITS, OR I SHALL BE FORCED TO VANQUISH YOU!
SNORT?
GRUNT-- WOULD YOU PLEASE GET RID OF THAT IDIOT FOR ME?
YOU WANT HER, HORSIE?
DEFEND YOURSELF!
RAARG!
COME GET HER!

MY HERO!
YOU'RE SO BIG AND STRONG!
I HOPE I CAN MAKE YOU HAPPY!
NOT TO WORRY...
YOU MAKE FINE ADDITION!
ADDITION...?
YES--TO HAREM!
C'MON--ME INTRODUCE YOU TO HEAD WIFE!
MOOOO!

THERE ARE VOICES IN THE DEPTHS OF SPACE - WAILS AND MOANS — CRIES OF ANGUISHED TORMENT FROM THE THROES OF COSMIC TURMOIL!
AND THERE IS SILENCE - A MANTLE FOR MADNESS THAT NO SOLITARY MAN CAN DISPEL - NOT EVEN THE UNSINKABLE GENERAL G.M. McCORK!
LISTEN! THE INTERCOM!!
SOMEONE IS TRYING TO CONTACT ME ON THE INTERCOM!
GENERAL G.M. McCORK! THE BATTERED OLD WARRIOR STANDS ON THE BRIDGE OF THE SPECTRASHIP LAST HOPE! HIS BODY AND SOUL ACHE WITH SCAR TISSUE FROM THE GRUELLING STRUGGLE TO PREVAIL! BUT, HE'S DONE IT - BY DAMN - HE LIVES! IN ALL THE UNIVERSE, ONLY HE REMAINS! OH, YES - GEN. McCORK IS INDEED A TRUE...
SURVIVOR!

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NO, GENERAL-- THERE ARE NO HUMAN VOICES CALLING ON THE INTERCOM- ONLY THE RASP AND SPUTTER OF MINDLESS STATIC! IT'S JUST ANOTHER OF YOUR FUTILE LITTLE GAMES TO OVERCOME A NUMBING, COLD LONELINESS!
NOW, IN DESPERATION, YOU EVEN COURT COMMUNION WITH A HIDEOUS REFLECTION!
YOU WEAR MY FACE!
AND IT'S THE FACE OF A MONSTER!
BUT, IN YOUR DREAMS, THERE ARE NO GAMES- JUST DEMONS AND TORTURED MEMORIES OF THE DAY THE EARTH DIED!
IT WAS THE ULTIMATE ABSURDITY! THE GREEDY, SPOILED, SELF-INTERESTED MEMBERS OF EMPIRE II, PUT INCENSE IN THE BURNER, GAVE A TOAST IN GOAT'S BLOOD AND...
...CAST THE VOTE THAT PLUNGED MANKIND INTO THE WAR OF ARMAGEDDON!

THE DEATH OF THE PLANET CAME AS THE BAUBLES OF WAR TURNED THE ATMOSPHERE INTO A BRIGHT, PULSATING RADIO-ACTIVE STEW!
THIS WAS A TIME WHEN MOST VALUES CHANGED, AND A NEW ELITE EMERGED !!
500 PEOPLE HAD BEEN CHOSEN TO SEEK THE SAFETY OF SOME, AS YET UNSPECIFIED, NEW WORLD! ONLY A DEDICATED, REAL SURVIVALIST COULD HAVE SO PRECISELY ENGINEERED THIS AMBITIOUS PROJECT! AND IT WAS ONLY NATURAL THAT HE BE PLACED AT THE HELM OF SUPREME AUTHORITY--GEN. G. M. McCORK!
FOR THE FIRST TIME, A MAJOR SPACE PROBE LIFTED-OFF WITHOUT FAN-FARE! AN ERA WAS CLOSED!
IT'S GONE!
THE SHIP, LAST HOPE WAS WELL PAST SATURN WHEN THE CERTAIN SIGNS OF EARTH'S DEMISE-FLASHED ACROSS THE HEAVENS!

NOW WITH NO RETURN, NAVIGATORS 'LOCKED ON' TO SPECTRA STAR MAPS TO SEARCH OUT PLANETS THAT COULD POSSIBLY SUPPORT A HOMELESS LIFEFORM!
THERE! WE'LL WORK TOWARD ZETA RETICULI!
HOWEVER, THE ODDS AGAINST SUCCESS BECAME SUDDENLY AND VIOLENTLY APPARENT...
HIT THE ALARM!
DAMN! HOT ROCKS!
THE TOTAL DAMAGE WAS NOT EXTENSIVE, BUT THE IMPLICATIONS WERE AWESOME, AND SERVED TO INTRODUCE THE HEAVY HAND OF McCORK JUSTICE.
C'MON, GENERAL...
SOMEONE IS RESPONSIBLE!
...WE'RE LOSIN' ENVIRONMENT!
AND WHO, BUT THE 'EARLY DETECTION' SECTION CHIEF!
GUILTY!
IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS, IT IS ESTABLISHED THAT THE FLIGHT OF 'LAST HOPE' CANNOT ACCOMODATE GUILT!

THE PERSONALITY AND AUTHORITY OF GEN. McCORK WERE ONLY A SMALL PART OF WHAT PROVED TO BE A TERROR COURSED FLIGHT!
THE PLANET SCION HAD LOOKED PROMISING!
WITH LUCK WE MAY MAKE A SCORE ON THE FIRST TRY!
LIFE! I READ ANIMAL LIFE!
ATMOSPHERE IS TOLERANT LET'S GO IN!
BUT THE EXCITEMENT OF A FIRST ALIEN LIFE ENCOUNTER TURNED TO HORROR AS SCION'S BLOODBEASTS MET THE INTRUDERS WITH DEADLY HOSTILITY...
AGGAH!
RETREAT!
TOO LATE! WE CAN'T SAVE 'EM!
H-1

FROM THAT EXPERIENCE ON – THE GENERAL COMMANDED THE SHIP FROM HIS QUARTERS – ISOLATION THAT SAVED HIM FROM THE LOVE SPORES OF ZANDU!
SHUTTLE-TWO – DAMMIT – I ORDER YOU TO AWAIT ANALYSIS BEFORE YOU TOUCH DOWN ON THAT PLANET!
DO YOU READ ME?
T'HELL WITH THAT FRIGHTENED OLD MAN – THERE ARE PEOPLE DOWN THERE...
...AN' I DON'T THINK THEY'RE HOSTILE!
HOSTILE? NO! AND, IF THEY WERE NOT QUITE HUMAN – THEY WERE COMPATIBLE WITH THE INTRUDER'S DESIRES!
WELCOME!
A GOLDEN WORLD!
WE SHARE ALL!
I'M LEAVING NOW – BUT WHEN I MAKE MY REPORT – MANY WILL COME HERE! I'LL BE WITH THEM!
YES, YOU WILL RETURN!
HOWEVER – THERE WOULD BE NO RETURN! WITHIN THIRTY HOURS, AMID RUPTURING VESSELS, A SPECTRE OF DEATH HAD CLAIMED THE LIVES OF 95% OF THE `LAST HOPE' COLONY!
WHAT HAVE WE DONE? WHAT PLAGUE HAVE WE BROUGHT TO OUR FELLOWS?

MINUTES AFTER HAVING DONE ITS MORTAL WORK-THE PESTILENCE PASSED!
MANKIND IS DOOMED!
WE WILL LOSE!
THAT PROPHECY WAS SEALED WHEN THE SHUTTLE CRAFT BURNED IN AN ACID CLOUD-KILLING THE FINAL MEMBERS OF THE 'LAST HOPE' COLONY! GEN. McCORK WAS ALONE!
THAT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO-NOW THE LONELINESS HAS BECOME UNBEARABLE! THERE IS NO SPIRITUAL WILL TO GO ON...
I CAN'T STAND THIS GNAWING DESPAIR-I MUST END IT-NOW!
SCIENCE HAS SAID THAT TO EXCEED THE SPEED OF LIGHT IS TO TURN INTO PURE ENERGY! WHAT BETTER WAY TO DIE?
GEN. McCORK OPENED THE THROTTLES-AND SETTLED BACK TO AWAIT A PAINLESS DEATH--
SUDDENLY- A BLINDING LIGHT ETCHED THE SCENE IN A SPRAY OF COLOR!
THEN...
MY GOD- WHAT HAS HAPPENED?
OH- NO!
THE REALIZATION CAME- HE HAD BROKEN THE LIGHT BARRIER-- HE HAD ENTERED INFINITY!
HERE WAS EVERYTHING — AND NOTHING!

I DID NOT DIE!
NO!
IT'S GOT TO END!
IT WILL END!
BLOOM
AHGGGH!
OH-LORD- WHAT IS THIS NIGHTMARE? HOW CAN THIS BE?
THE GENERAL WILL COME TO KNOW THAT- AS A CITIZEN OF INFINITY- ALL THINGS HAVE CHANGED! THERE IS NO BEGINNING - NO END - NO LIFE - NO DEATH!
AND SO - GENERAL S.M. McCORK WILL EXIST IN ETERNITY AS A LONELY, MUTILATED, OLD MAN!
BUT, WHEN THE GODS DISCUSS SUCH THINGS, THEY WILL AGREE THAT HERE IS THE CHAMP - THE ALL-TIME, GREAT SURVIVOR...